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ABSTRACT

The outcomes of 43 project case studies and a country case study (Nepal) were examined to identify the impact of adult women's literacy. A look at women's situation in developing countries showed that women had multifarious roles, long working hours, and less access to education than males. The case studies revealed the following social effects of women's literacy: (1) a greater likelihood of using child health-care techniques; (2) enhanced readiness to send children to school; (3) cleaner homes and better child nutrition; and (4) greater disposition to space families. Among the economic effects of literacy were greater capacity to mobilize credit, greater willingness to use banks, and readiness to participate in and establish economic organizations. Personal effects included release from fears of humiliation and powerlessness, readiness to influence family decisions, increased cooperation in socioeconomic organization, and new capacity for leadership. A strong case was made for taking women's literacy more seriously. Components of a United Kingdom government policy and strategy and nongovernmental organization policies and strategies were suggested. Allocation of additional resources and more research were recommended. The transcript of "Women and Literacy," a speech by Lynda Chalker, follows the report's seven chapters. Appendixes include the following: United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Relevant Extracts; a checklist for participation of women in developing projects; a list of case studies; and a list of 62 references. (YLB)

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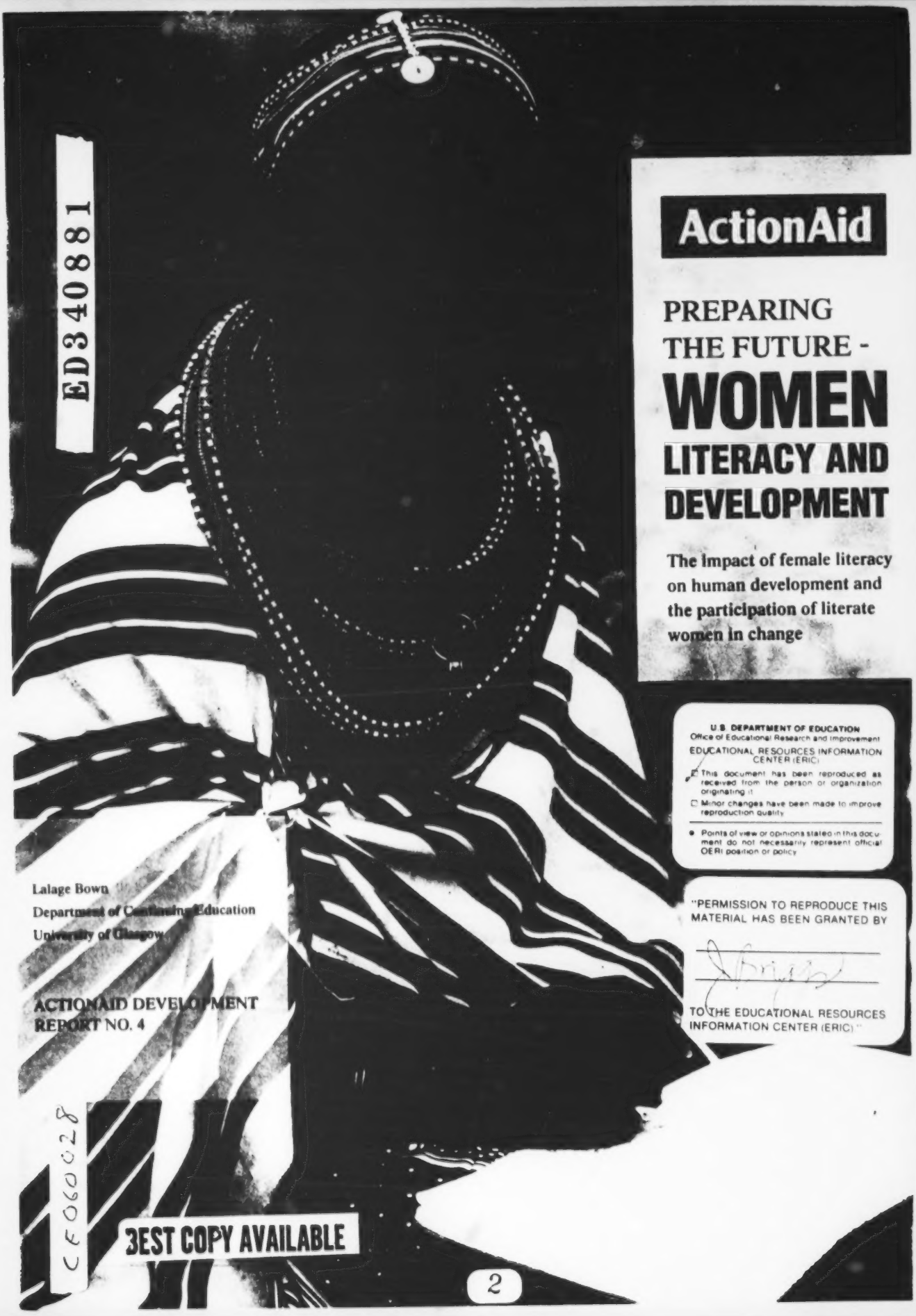

ActionAid

PREPARING THE FUTURE - WOMEN LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT

The impact of female literacy on human development and the participation of literate women in change

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ACTIONAID DEVELOPMENT REPORT NO. 4

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“Women bear and raise the children - so women prepare the future. How can the future be good if women are ignorant? (A semi-literate Zapotec woman, Mexico, speaking to Perdita Huston, 1979.)

I want to read and write, so I can stop being the shadow of other people. (Canadian woman, 1990.)”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was imaginative and timely of ActionAid to decide to focus attention on the theme of women's literacy and I have very much appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the discussion by preparing this report.

While undertaking the work, I have had reason to be very grateful to a number of ActionAid workers in various parts of the world (from Nepal to Somerset). Judith Randel's thoughtfulness and highly knowledgeable interest has been a substantial support throughout and I have also derived benefit from the perceptiveness of the other members of my guiding committee: Robert Dodd and Chris Stocks. I would also like to express warm thanks to the following ActionAid staff (listed in alphabetical order): David Archer (whose excellent book, written jointly with Patrick Costello, is in my view one of the best works on literacy to have been published for several years); Prakash Dutt; Jeff Chinnock; Catherine Cross; Tony German; Mary Martin; Monica Morris; Mutombo Mulami; Anna Robinson; and V. Sathyabalan. My debt to the work of three ActionAid consultants, on Nepal, Sierra Leone and Somalia, will be seen by the frequent references to these countries and I should like to record a cordial acknowledgement to: Prakash Singh Adikari; Cream Wright; and Sacadiya Musa Ahmed.

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Finally, the whole text has been transcribed and processed with her usual extraordinary competence by Mrs Janice Ferguson, whom I can never begin to thank properly.

October 1990

SUMMARY

1.1. In International Literacy Year there has been much rhetoric about women's literacy and many claims about its effects. So far the rhetoric has not led to substantial aid to women's literacy by multi-lateral donors, the British government or British NGOs, though there are signs that the Jomtien conference on *Education for All* may lead to more investment in it.

1.2. One of the problems has been that so-called proofs of the effects of women's literacy relate to women who have been to school. This report deliberately concentrated on the almost un-researched subject of the impact of adult women's literacy through studying the outcomes of 43 project case studies and one country case study (Nepal). The projects and reports were from ActionAid, ODA files on Joint Funding activities and a review of published work on the subject.

1.3. At the outset, it is explained that literacy is not *a single unified competence*, nor a fixed measurable achievement. There is a hierarchy of literacies and a learner can progress in skilfulness, including learning literacy in the language of government if that is not the woman's mother-tongue.

1.4. The main threads of the enquiry have been the effect of literacy on women's 'preparation of the future' and on their capacity to emerge from being *the shadows of other people*. In the background has been a view of development as comprising: economic growth; equity in distribution of society's resources to meet human needs; and participation in decisions about how those resources are distributed. The roles of women in developing countries are seen to be multifarious, often including agriculture and water supply; women's working hours are very long, making demands on their physical and mental energy.

1.5. Cultural and other factors have led to a large gap between the level of access to education of males and females, so that of the nearly one-billion people in the world said by Unesco to be illiterate, at least two-thirds are women. If present efforts at reduction of illiteracy continue on the same scale, it will be a century before the gap is closed.

1.6. This report has been written in the conviction that the gap should be closed, both on grounds of equity and because investment in women's literacy could show a useful return. The case-studies have been explored to assess what kind of return there may be. Social, economic and personal effects can be seen.

1.7. Social effects include:
- A greater likelihood of literate women making use of child health-care techniques in the home, such as Oral Rehydration Therapy;
- A greater readiness to present children for immunisation;
- Cleaner homes and better child nutrition;
- An enhanced readiness to send children, including daughters, to school;
- A greater disposition by literate women to space families.

1.8. Economic effects have been more difficult to explore fully, since projects often start with an economic purpose, which then leads to a demand for literacy, which in turn affects women's economic activities. Among economic effects of literacy are:
- Greater capacity to mobilise credit and greater willingness to use banks;
- Readiness to participate in and to establish new forms of economic organisations (e.g. cooperatives, small businesses).

1.9. It is probable that literacy may strengthen women's capacity to care for the environment, but this subject was not researched at this time.

1.10. Personal effects of literacy on women include:
A release from fears of humiliation and of powerlessness (as a Mozambican woman put it: "When people don't know reading and writing, they are afraid"); this leads to a strong increase in confidence and courage;
- A readiness to influence family decisions, on such matters as the marriage age of girls;
- A greater disposition to cooperate in socio-economic organisations;
- A new capacity for leadership in church and welfare organisations;
- A readiness to organise against injustice and for positive advocacy on social and economic matters.

Evidence on these personal effects came from men as well as women.

1.11. Altogether, there is a very strong case for taking women's literacy more seriously than in the past. The key conclusion is that both official donors, including the ODA and NGOs should give greater importance to women's literacy in both policy and resource allocation. Operational policies should include collection of statistics on the amount (and proportion) of aid spent on adult literacy.

1.12. Suggested components of a UK government policy and strategy are:
1. The government should use its authority in all the multi-lateral agencies to ensure more spending and effort on women's literacy;
2. Women's literacy should be a required element in such aid packages negotiated with developing countries as include education, health, income-generation, agriculture or *women's promotion.*

3. It should set a target for a percentage of the aid budget to be spent on literacy;
4. In approval of programmes approved under the Joint Funding Scheme, a women's literacy element should similarly be required;
5. There should be provision for monitoring the progress of women's literacy and its impact in all projects:
a. Those negotiated with governments;
b. Those operating under the Joint Funding scheme;
6. Part of the technical training budget should be used for training women managers and instructors in literacy programmes;
7. ODA should give more thought to ways in which more of the developing-country women studying in Britain could be trained in some of the issues and requirements in women's literacy.

1.13. Suggested components of NGO policies and strategies are:
1. An even greater attention to *women's perception* in all programmes;
2. An element of women's literacy in all development projects;
3. Monitoring and assessment of the progress and impact of women's literacy.

1.14. Both ODA and NGOs need to allocate more resources to women's literacy and to be ready to plan for a period of years.

1.15 Some ideas are put forward on curricula, organisation and research. Curricula should be developmental, associated with other areas of knowledge besides the literacy skill and the women themselves should be involved in designing their own programme. A *popular education* approach is recommended and use should be made of radio and television. Literacy needs to be supported and sustained by a literate environment and success is more likely where literacy and development work are done in alliance with existing sustainable organisations.

1.16 Finally, there are plenty of topics on which further research would be useful, since women's literacy is *an utterly under-researched area*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. Starting points

> Achieving literacy could be one of the first steps in a process enabling women:
> - to take control over their own lives,
> - to participate on a more equal basis in society,
>
> and eventually
> - to free themselves from . . . exploitation . . .
>
> In addition to social justice, human rights and equality, there are many other human, social and economic reasons to urge governments and organizations seriously to take special action to promote the literacy education of women and girls, a priority objective of the International Literacy Year. The sole fact that a mother's level of education has a positive effect on her children's health and progress in school should be a strong enough argument. (Lind, 1990).

This report has been written in the *belief* that Agneta Lind's statements are true, but in the *knowledge* that there has been little systematic effort to validate them empirically. Many of the so-called proofs of a relationship between women's literacy and various socio-economic changes are based on schooling statistics rather than adult literacy data and while they do constitute an argument for emphasis on the importance of girls' access to school, they tell us nothing about the outcomes of literacy for adult women.

It also seems to be the case that very many educational and community development programmes involving women may have a literacy component but do not pay it sufficient attention to assess what the results of literacy acquisition have been, either for the women themselves or for their societies. The rhetoric of both official aid donors and of NGOs is strong on the importance of women's literacy, but the reality is that it does not feature very strongly in actual programmes or in the evaluation of programmes. As Krystyna Chlebowska (1990) says:

> Research, investigation and studies on literacy training for adult women are few and far between.

This is partly the result of disillusion with some previously accepted ideas. One idea, that literacy in and by itself would result in change, has been found to have flaws. The well-used Latin American cartoon in which a peasant (male) says: "I used to be miserably poor and couldn't even write my name – now I'm just miserably poor" epitomises the main flaw. The fact, however, that literacy is not the sole lever of change does not mean that significant change will come about without literacy. A relevant comment was made by an ActionAid consultant's paper commissioned as part of the research for this report:

> Literacy alone cannot change much in rural modes of life unless combined with other development issues.

While the point was put with some vigour in the 1975 Declaration of Persepolis:

> Literacy, like education in general, is not the driving force of historical change. It is not the only means of liberation, but it is an essential instrument for all social change.

A second failed idea is that programmes *for* women are about integrating them in development. Such programmes have not by and large worked because they start from the premise that women are on the margin of their societies and have somehow to be brought in. Many development plans and programmes do ignore women's interests and comments, but women, whether ignored or not, whether subjects or objects, are inevitably actors in the development process. At present many of them are probably actors in preparing a negative future for themselves and their daughters, for instance by not taking healthy decisions about family size and spacing and by conniving in keeping girls out of school and/or marrying them off early. The answer to the failure of many programmes *for* women is not to abandon women's programmes as such, but to ensure that women are involved in, consulted about and help to manage all development programmes (including of course the ones in which only women participate).

Besides disillusion with notions of literacy as the key to change and with strategies based on the idea of integrating women in development, a third reason why rhetoric and reality in women's literacy provision do not meet may be to do with the way in which much international data is still presented. The classic statement in the Brandt Report (1980) still applies:

> No political system today automatically assures the equal status of women, and production-oriented societies generally tend to undervalue their contribution. Statistical methods still largely ignore the contribution of women when it takes place within the household rather than in the labour market, and they also tend to ignore the economic contributions of women because their employment is often concentrated in the so-called *informal sector* or is seasonal and thus difficult

to measure. UN statistics also underestimate the number of households in which the woman is the de facto economic head because they use biased definitions of head-of-household instead of criterion reflecting actual economic contributions. Thus women *remain statistically invisible.* 99

In fairness, it must be said that there have been attempts to redress the balance, in recent World Bank annual reports and in the UNDP *Human Development Report*, but information on women's roles, contributions, etc. is still relatively thin. This being the case, if we do not know exactly where women stand, it becomes hard to work out whether they have moved on as the result of any new variable or intervention such as literacy.

Here, I have tried to suggest at least some indications about changes and movement affected by literacy, if not affected by literacy alone. This is a first tentative effort, in hopes of catalysing both discussion and further enquiry.

1.2. Questions about female literacy and why they are worth asking

The questions which this report set out to begin to answer fell into two kinds, one about the effect of women's literacy on their society and the second about the effect on themselves.

Question 1. Does an increase in women's literacy affect social and economic development?

This is too vague and needs unpacking. Looking at the social impact, can we say that an increase in women's literacy has an effect on:

- The infant mortality rate?
- Child nutrition (for both boys and girls)?
- Fertility patterns?

ADAM HINTON

For women's literacy, time may be the most important constraint. More women facilitators must be trained and above all, women must be consulted and involved in planning projects.

- Life expectancy of mothers?
- Education of the succeeding generation (especially of girls)?

Looking at the economic impact, can we say that an increase in women's literacy has an effect on:

- The nature of women's involvement in production (i.e. both the scale of their involvement and their degree of control)?
- Their capacity to mobilise credit and savings?
- Their capacity to establish and operate various types of economic organisation (e.g. cooperatives)?
- Their readiness to engage as individuals in business enterprise?
- Their spending patterns?

Question 2. Does an increase in women's literacy lead to the increased empowerment of women as agents of change in family, community and nation? Can we say that an increase in women's literacy:

- Results in changes within the family (relationships, way in which family decisions are taken)?
- Leads to any change or development within a community?
- Leads to any change in the processes of national planning and/or in the kind of policies generated?

i.e. Are women more involved in the decisions?
And do the policies take more account of women's interests?

These questions are important for reasons already implied in Agneta Lind's statement. If as a result of International Literacy Year, national governments in poor countries contemplate spending more on women's literacy, they need to be convinced that there will be a return on their expenditure – and the same goes for developed countries or international agencies contemplating aid to women's literacy activities.

More will be said about women in economic life in developing countries in 2.1., but here it needs saying that women bear a great burden of responsibility for any successful combating of poverty. This is because of the *multiple roles* which women play:

> In Africa, approximately 80% of the women live in rural areas. The tasks which these women are expected to perform and the skills needed to carry them out are complex and varied. The rural woman must be able to eliminate malnutrition from her family through increasing the output and diversification of food crops on the farm and improving the nutritional value of the family diet. She must also be able to supply food and water for the family as well as convey farm produce to the market; to process and store food from season to season; to obtain the best prices and barters at the local markets; to take a large measure of the responsibility for the welfare of members of the family and, when her husband is absent, for the management of the farm as well. *In short, the rural woman has the major responsibility for lifting her family out of poverty.*
> (Marilyn Carr (1976), International Council of Women Pan African Seminar, Freetown, Sierra Leone)

The role of women in agriculture is vital in many parts of the world. For instance:

Table 1. Male and female share of agricultural work (Africa)

Activity	% Share	
	Male	Female
Ploughing	70	30
Planting	50	50
Hoeing/weeding	30	70
Transporting	20	80
Storing	20	80
Processing	10	90
Marketing	40	60
Husbandry	50	50

Source: UN Economic Commission for Africa, 1975

The research on which the above table is based was done in Kenya and Ethiopia in the mid-1970s, but other subsequent research in other parts of Africa corroborates the picture.

It is suggested that literacy could help women to contribute to development, since with it they should be better equipped to make use of labour and time-saving technologies and thus be more efficient producers of goods and services. Of course literacy will be of little benefit to them or their society unless it is accompanied by the opportunity for access to time and labour-saving technologies; while their economic contribution will be limited without such means as credit and land.

Our second (and more fundamental) question is important to anyone who cares about justice and the reduction of inequalities in society. There are many people who fear that literacy will not help women, since it will merely make them more biddable and easier for male-dominated hierarchies to control. If this is a common result of female literacy, then literacy could be seen as rather pointless for them. The question really is what kind of literacy leads to greater empowerment and what simply to greater loss of autonomy. By what kind of literacy is meant what approaches should be used in literacy teaching and also what other forms of knowledge should accompany literacy to make it functional for women.

1.3. Definitions – What do we mean by literacy and literacies?

The simple definition of literacy, used by UNESCO for 40 years, is that a person is literate who can both read and write a short simple statement on their everyday life. Countless literacy campaigns and schemes have used a test based on this as their criterion for success or failure. The statement encompasses the idea that literacy is a skill and links it with daily life, so that it hints at the notion of functionality, of literacy having to be used in a way which is relevant and useful. But it is not much more helpful than saying that a person is a musician if she can play a simple tune.

Just as that begs the question of what instrument, so many definitions of literacy, including the Unesco one, beg questions about script, orthography and language. In particular, the question of language is critical in the very many countries where a large number of people speak a different language from that used in official transactions and the higher reaches of education. While it is accepted that the skill of literacy is more easily learned through the mother-tongue, one of the weaknesses of many women's literacy programmes is that they stop there. Apart from the fact that there may be only quite limited reading matter in languages used by small populations, there is a constraint on what influence new literates can have on their societies if they cannot communicate beyond their own group. An Argentine woman working in the Centre for Self-Managed Development in La Paz, Bolivia, was getting at this when she said:

> Spanish is the language of power and we must adopt it if we are to assert ourselves and to seek change.
> (Archer and Costello 1990)

A move from literacy in one language to literacy in another reminds us that literacy is a progression – as Kenneth Levine (1986) says, literacy is not a single unified competence, but must be seen as a multiplicity or hierarchy of literacies. No one can wake up one morning and say: "I am literate", as if it is a fixed measurable achievement like having climbed all the

British mountain peaks over a given height. Even if one views literacy as just another skill, on the analogy with almost all other skills from well-digging to cooking, there is progression in skilfulness, variety of application and speed of performance.

Literacy is, however, in the twentieth century more than just another skill. Brian Street (1990) and others have convincingly explained that it is not true that Western alphabetic, essay-text literacy is the only vehicle for scientific activity and analytical thought, but it is now the case that very many types of employment are not accessible to the non-literate and that to benefit from scientific achievement even in quite simple ways some skills in literacy and numeracy are necessary. As explained later, the use of oral rehydration requires accurate measurement and it is trite but true that instructions on medicine bottles need to be read if the medicine is to be properly used. There are many sad anecdotes of people who couldn't read the label drinking embrocations or giving medicine to infants although there is a printed warning against doing so.

The twentieth century has brought new means of communication, such as radio, television and video and it can be argued that they too can be *read* and that they can be used as a substitute for print material. The transistor radio is cheap and widely available and, as is suggested later, it can be used very effectively in programmes for e.g. health education. The difficulty is that the electronic media are more easily controllable than written media and in developing countries are often quite rigidly controlled. Their messages are more ephemeral than those in a pamphlet or book, and in poor countries with limited talk-back or outside broadcast facilities, the communication tends to be all one way. After all, even in our comparatively affluent society, one of the main ways of talking back to broadcasters remains the written letter. This is not in any way to decry the importance and value of the electronic media (and I agree with Archer and Costello – below – on their usefulness). It is to suggest that literacy in the traditional sense still has its place, that it has not yet become an obsolete skill.

To tie up this discussion on the meanings of literacy and literacies, an extract from Archer and Costello (1990) gives practical application:

> "The commonsense view of literacy is as a technique: the learning of the alphabet and ability to use it. However, the role of these techniques in development projects can be called into question. In rural areas where the written word plays a minimal role, the techniques of literacy seem marginal to the needs of the people. Literacy campaigns in such communities are likely to promote migration to the cities [where] literacy skills are not enough to guarantee employment or adequate housing. They can even be counter-productive, since they can make people more vulnerable to manipulation, whether through advertising, political propaganda or the promotion of cultural assimilation.
>
> As a reaction to this technicist approach, many popular-education groups have linked the teaching of literacy techniques to the development of a critical consciousness. This can be misconceived. Often the teaching of the alphabet is rather clumsily grafted to a process of political consciousness-raising. The techniques themselves become almost irrelevant . . . . If conscientization is detached from the techniques, then conscientization is reduced to the imparting of a political perspective.
>
> Some . . . popular-education groups . . . have a more coherent, alternative, view of literacy. It is one which starts from the empowerment of the learners, in which literacy is seen as their ability to express their own needs and desires using whatever techniques are most relevant . . . Practically, this has a number of implications.
>
> First, it means that in different concrete circumstances, the techniques most relevant to empowerment will be different. The reading and writing of television, video and radio can be more relevant than the alphabet in societies where communication is less dependent on the written word.
>
> Secondly, it leaves literacy teaching secure from the charge of ideological manipulation, since it is the learners themselves who set the political agenda for dialogue, based on their own experience rather than on any theoretical ideological position.
>
> Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, if literacy is to enable learners to express their needs effectively, it must in practice be linked to organizational structures that will give these demands a collective voice... Conceived in this way, literacy is an indicator of the level of democracy in a society." 99

1.4. Givens – What has been taken for granted?

Many substantive issues cannot be explored in a short-term study and extended discussion of them would in any case distract from the cardinal issue of women's literacy and its effects. Certain assumptions have had to be made and are made explicit here, to avoid misunderstanding. First, *development* is taken to be multi-dimensional, with components including economic growth, equity in distribution of society's resources to meet human needs and participation in decisions about how these resources are distributed. In general, the recent UNDP report (1990) is accepted:

> "Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect."

It will be realised that the enlargement of choices relating to health and education are relevant to this study and that issues of equity underlie the whole discussion of women's opportunities for literacy and education.

Secondly, with regard to equity, while I am aware that there are many people in the world who would not accept the proposition that women are owed a fair share of the world's resources and opportunities, obviously this report would have little point unless it was predicated on the assumption that it is both just and necessary to reduce the literacy differential which prevails between men and women.

Thirdly, this study is limited to *adult women*, rather than girls and is concerned with non-formal, out-of-school literacy programmes. This is because the major reported gap in literacy is between men and women over the age of 15. This is not to be construed as implying that what happens to girls is of any less importance – rather that equity demands that as many girls should go to school as boys (non-formal provision for girls is open to some suspicion as it may cut them off from formal schooling).

Here, we are trying to establish whether and in what ways adult women who have not been to school (or have dropped or been pushed out) may benefit themselves and others by attaining some measure of literacy.

1.5. How this research was done

Because the time-scale for the production of this report was rather short, there was a heavy reliance on work already done by others. A substantial English-language literature scan was undertaken, including publications from developing countries, some of the documentation from the Jomtien *Education for All* conference and the answers to the International Bureau of Education survey for the international conference on the eradication or massive reduction of illiteracy. Consultations took place with ActionAid workers and a few workers from other NGOs, so that ideas were collected and also some useful anecdotal evidence.

Because of the known sparseness of research on women and literacy, and also because much of that research was quite old, it was decided to gather case-study material on various projects and programmes over the past five years. ActionAid undertook to provide some reports from the field and to ask some of its field-workers to assist in this. A loosely-structured questionnaire was sent out to them and six reports were returned. It might have been objected that where workers were reporting on their own projects, there would be a likelihood of bias. This was balanced by the commissioning of three consultants' reports, from Nepal, Somalia and Sierra Leone. The one from Nepal included not only a case-study of ActionAid literacy work but also a brief assessment of literacy projects by the Nepal government and 12 other NGOs and international agencies.

In order to benefit from the experience of other NGOs and to obtain a picture of some of the outcomes of British government aid, case-studies were also selected from ODA Joint Funded Projects. This was possible through the generosity of the ODA in opening their files. From these files, a list of 124 projects was drawn up from the areas of education, non-formal education, small- and large-scale health projects and women's programmes. Fifty-five cases were then selected to provide coverage across continents, across a variety of NGOs and a variety of initiatives and to be representative of projects involving both urban and rural women. Two files could not be traced, so 53 cases were scrutinised. Of these, 17 were found to contain information applicable to the questions asked in this research. They comprised projects assisted, through the Joint Funding Scheme, by seven different NGOs.

In addition, 17 case-studies reported by other researchers were used and two further cases collected by myself.

Overall, the following project case-studies were used:

Table 2. Derivation of case-studies

ActionAid	8
(including one country case study)	
ODA Joint Funding	17 (7 NGOs)
Other researchers	17
Personal collation	2
Total	**44**

The countries from which cases were reported were: Bangladesh, Belize, Brazil, Bolivia, Burundi, Cambodia, Chile, Ecuador, Gambia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Yemen, Zaire, Zimbabwe.

1.6. Some problems in researching female literacy

While it will be seen that a sizeable amount of data was reviewed, in some ways the exercise was disappointing. While Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this

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report will show that at least some conclusions could be drawn. it was noticed how many project reports are quite vague in their assessment of outcomes – either qualitative or quantitative. It was also noticeable that many programmes in such areas as family planning and immunisation were put together without any literacy component or link.

Perhaps for the reasons mentioned in 1.3., adult literacy, including women's literacy, seems to have a rather low profile in actual projects, in spite of all the fanfare of International Literacy Year. This rather negative preliminary conclusion will be taken account of in the chapter on recommendations (Chapter 7).

There are other problems. As mentioned earlier, much of the research cited internationally as *proofs* of a connection between women's literacy and such phenomena as lower infant mortality rates and smaller family size are actually based on a correlation between levels of *school education* and these phenomena. In a number of studies, a given number of years of schooling is postulated as necessary for any of these other changes to take place and often a further number of years is then assumed before the impact is felt. For instance, the *BRIDGES* and *ABEL* projects sponsored by USAID found a positive correlation between increased primary and secondary enrolment of girls and a decline in infant mortality and in fertility. But there was a lag of 20 years before the effects were visible.

The effect of literacy on adult women might well be rather different. The time-span after which attitude and behaviour change might be seen could be shorter, since the women are already fulfilling adult roles in society and are in a position to apply their learning at once. On the other hand, if the literacy programmes are not consciously transformative, it might be argued that it is unlikely the acquisition of literacy skills would counteract already adopted habits.

A further difficulty lies in the complex nature of causality. Because literacy is accompanied by some kind of personal or community change it cannot necessarily be concluded that literacy caused that change – or that even if literacy played a part, literacy alone was the cause. Here, we will try to identify cases where literacy is at least correlated with a change and will regard the evidence as stronger if the change is seen as a direct outcome of a literacy project or a project with a literacy component.

2.1. Women in developing countries

All generalisations are in danger of obscuring the particular, and as Sarah White (1989) points out, it is widely accepted that women are deeply divided by class, age, marital status, community and so on. But there are certain widely applicable diagnoses of the roles and condition of women in developing countries.

In the first place it seems that, for cultural reasons, females often get off to a bad start. A study by C. Sathyamala quoted by Vandana Shiva (1988) showed that in Punjab, where food was plentiful in the market, there were the following percentages of undernourished children in privileged and underprivileged households:

Table 3. Child nutrition by sex and household status

	Male	Female
Privileged Children		
Normal nutrition	86	70
70-80% of expected weight	10	11
Less than 70% of expected weight	4	13
Underprivileged Children		
Normal nutrition	43	26
70-80% of expected weight	43	24
Less than 70% of expected weight	14	50

It is open to speculation, since no research has been done, that in the households where girls are less well-nourished, the adult women are non-literate even though prosperous. What is definite is that under-nourished children who go to school are in a less favourable position for learning than well-nourished ones; girls who do go to school are likely to be less well-nourished and thus less able to benefit from it than their male counterparts.

In the second place, the diversity as well as multiplicity of women's roles is nearly universal.

"The essence of women's distinctiveness lies in the multiplicity of their roles. Most men can confine themselves mainly to being producers. Most women, in addition to being heavily involved in economic production, take prime responsibility as home managers, child-bearers and carers of children and the elderly. Both women and men are also community organisers. In consequence, women work longer hours than men, usually with smaller resources, fewer opportunities and lower rewards. Inequities, in fact, typify gender differences. As has been pointed out in the literature on the UN Decade for Women, women account for half the world's population, perform two-thirds of the hours worked (though are recorded as working only one-third of those hours), receive one-tenth of the world's income, and have one-hundredth of the world's property registered in their name. These asymmetries mean that women almost always face more severe constraints and harsher choices in their use of time than do men . . . (Mary Chinery-Hesse and others, 1990)"

The long hours which women work has been well documented and was referred to in several of the cases studied here. For instance, the ActionAid Gambian case-study noted that Gambian rural women worked from about 5.00 a.m. in the morning until 9.00 p.m. Such long and pressured days are obviously among the reasons why women find it difficult to gain access to literacy or to any form of education.

The unpaid contribution of women is under-rated everywhere, but in poor

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"If a woman has literacy and numeracy, she can read what's on the medicine bottle, she can read what's on the fertiliser packet . . . it really is like a unifying link between all types of projects".
The Minister for Overseas Development, The Rt. Hon. Lynda Chalker.

countries, especial recognition should be given to women's service in providing water. Unfortunately, when large-scale dam and irrigation projects are set up, villages and village women are usually ignored, so that the women still walk many miles for water, even when large man-made lakes are relatively close by.

In rural life, in certain seasons of the year the pressures on a woman may be greater and may have repercussions on her family.

"Where women's work in the fields is extensive, time for child care and food preparation is reduced. Reductions in absolute and relative calorie intake may result. Where calorie intake remains the same, energy expenditure may increase, resulting in loss of body weight and other symptoms of malnutrition. Where food stores are running low from the

previous harvest, and increased calorie requirements are not met, labour productivity may decline, threatening the future harvest. (Baudot, 1982)"

One of the phenomena of the present day is rural urban migration. The huge urban agglomerations in many developing countries (Calcutta, Lagos, Sao Paulo) may grow at the rate of as much as 16% a year and attract both men and women. Quite often, however, women stay behind and then there are further pressures on their energy and time, as well as a decline in their options for efficient agricultural management. As Baudot points out:

"Absence of males during the dry season may mean that necessary repair tasks, such as building dykes for wet rice cultivation go unattended, with obvious consequences."

The removal of males to the towns leaves women as de facto heads of households, however much this may be obscured by custom and fashions of description.

Looking at both agricultural and industrial sectors, Susan Joekes (1987) in the INSTRAW study on *Women in the World Economy* found that

"The overall rate of female income-earning activity has not changed significantly in developing countries in the post-war period" and that "the conditions of women's work may have deteriorated relative to men's within each sector as a result of international economic pressures". (Nevertheless) "one fundamentally beneficial change for women can be ascribed largely to international market changes. By leading to a relatively strong demand for female labour in industry, international factors have induced a significant shift in the distribution of female employment away from agriculture in developing countries. In 1980, 16.3% of women in the labour force in developing countries were in the industrial sector, compared with 12.5% ten years earlier. More than a quarter of the total industrial labour force in developing countries was made up of women in 1980, compared with one fifth twenty years earlier. Taking their lower overall rate of participation into account, by the end of the 1970s women were better represented in industry in developing than developed countries."

Within agriculture, however, the evidence is not entirely clear. In a comment on the impact of technological change on women in the agricultural sector, the World Bank Report on Poverty (1990) explains:

"Modern seed varieties, irrigation, and the increased commercialization of crops have commonly been accompanied by the greater use of hired labour, mostly from landless households. The new technologies have also had important implications for the division of household labour. Wage labour has replaced unpaid labour, and in some cases male labour has replaced female labour. This has raised concerns that technological change has harmed women.

The substitution of hired labour for family labour usually improves the household's standard of living. In the Philippines, for example, the new technologies raised farming incomes, allowing households to hire labour and purchase labour-saving farm implements. This reduced the number of hours worked by family members in low-productivity jobs on the farm and allowed them to engage in other, more productive activities, such as trade or raising livestock. In addition, greater demand for hired labour provided jobs to landless workers.

Modern varieties have, in general, raised the demand for hired female labour. They usually require more labour per acre – particularly in tasks typically done by women, such as weeding, harvesting and post-harvesting work. A study of three Indian states concluded that the use of hired female labour was greater on farms that had adopted modern varieties than on those that had not.

In some cases, however, mechanization has led to lower female employment. The outcome has often depended on the task mechanized. When predominantly female tasks were given over to machinery, women were displaced. This happened in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines with the replacement of the finger knife as a harvesting tool and the introduction of direct seeding and portable mechanical threshing . . . A study in the Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal found that where chemical fertilizers have replaced cow dung, men rather than women now apply the fertilizer because women lack access to the information provided by extension services.

When women were displaced, the effect on their incomes and on household welfare depended on whether they found more productive jobs elsewhere. Overall non-farm employment did increase, but data classified by gender are scanty."

Although data may be scanty, what evidence there is tends to suggest that female unemployment in the formal sector is slightly higher than male unemployment (this may have some connection with educational level/literacy).

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Table 4. Unemployment rates by household income level and sex, Latin America

	General	Households Indigent	Poor	Non-Poor
Chile 1984				
Average	19.4	32.0	18.7	8.2
Male	18.4	30.8	15.3	7.2
Female	21.5	34.8	26.3	9.8
Peru 1982				
Average	6.3	13.5	7.1	4.8
Male	6.7	10.1	4.6	3.7
Female	9.3	19.3	12.8	6.6
Costa Rica 1982				
Average	10.2	14.2	8.9	3.5
Male	10.3	14.8	8.7	3.0
Female	9.9	13.0	9.1	4.8

Source: Lopez and Pollack, 1989

(Note: The literacy rate in Costa Rica is very high and is the same for men and women. This may be one factor in this picture).

Much of the evidence used to diagnose the situation of women in poor countries belongs to the 1970s and early 1980s (the outcome of research touched off by the International Women's Decade of 1975–85). A further set of changes has emerged in the 1980s, which have borne heavily on women in the developing world.

> "In the face of mounting and unpayable international debts, Third World countries have had to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to obtain the foreign exchange needed to maintain minimal levels of production and consumption. The price of this assistance is a package of policies known as *structural adjustment*. This particular policy mix includes cuts in government expenditures for health, education, and social security, as well as for "utilities" and amenities such as water, roads, and low-income housing; the removal of subsidies on food; the imposition of charges or steep price increases on basic services such as water; and the steady and precipitous devaluations of currency. These policies jeopardize women, especially poor women, in three ways by simultaneously reducing their access to income and services, while increasing the demands on their time to fill the gaps created by the cuts in social services. The interrelation of women's productive and reproductive roles (i.e. all those tasks required for the maintenance of life itself) makes social services critical to women's productivity in the economy . . . a fact that is often overlooked by planners who concentrate on *production* at the expense of *consumption*. To cut these services, therefore, jeopardizes the productive capacity of the economy itself. (Antrobus in Gallin and others, 1989)"

This problem is taken up in the Commonwealth report, *Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s:*

> ". . . adjustment policies which fail to incorporate women's concerns fully are not only unjust and cause unnecessary hardship but also imperil the effectiveness of the policies themselves". They emphasise that this is not a question of "marginal additions to the present adjustment efforts. The problem of existing adjustment is not its omission of a few projects for women, but its failure to take adequate account of the time, roles, potential contribution and needs of half of each country's population. (Chinery-Hesse and others, 1989)"

In inherently difficult conditions, made worse by the prevailing international policies of the 1980s, for very many women *survival* becomes the only issue. Against this backcloth, why talk about *literacy?*

Here are three diagnostic comments on women's position in three different continents, which may hint at some of the reasons why women's literacy could be critical.

The first diagnosis relates to Bangladesh:

> "In part, then, it is politics *internal* to Bangladeshi society that obscures much of women's activity. While it is important to recognise informal forms of power (such as personal influence and brokerage), the extent to which Bangladeshi society prescribes male dominance should not be underestimated. In response, women collude in a complex web of conventions and petty deceits which disguise the extent of their activities. This, first, is a means of retaining control: secrecy is the prime means for women to avoid family plunder of their goods. Second, women's dependence has a high cultural value: it is a matter of shame if a husband cannot 'support' his wife in full. In the interests of good

relationships in the household – and social status in the community – it is thus important that women present no challenge to the formal authority of their men. Third, and most crucially, *whatever women do is subsumed within their family roles.* In these, particularly as mothers, women are conceived in relationship to others, and so by definition cannot be *independent* . It is these relations that determine the use of resources within the household, not simply by brute force ('I am under my husband') but crucially even in areas of personal choice. This identity does not change when women work outside the household . . . For many women it is in fulfilling cultural ideals of motherhood (which include household management) that they gain some dominance . . . It is the key paradox of women's gender construction that these relations, which deny them rights in the material products of their activity, constitute their key resource. (White, 1989)

NAFOR RAHMAN

This report recommends that women's literacy should be a required element of aid packages that include health, income generation, agriculture or women's promotion.

This describes an entrenched situation. By contrast, women in Latin America have been incorporated into broader socio-economic processes, but still have little chance to share in control of those processes.

"The problem of women in the region is not their integration in the development process . . . The problem is different: is [their] contribution efficient? Is this contribution valued? Has the status of women improved as their economic contribution increases? Do women benefit from government strategies aimed at the sectors in which they operate? Is there increased awareness of the new role of women in the design of policy strategies, given the advances made in the region in planning matters?

In general terms, the reply is negative... women have not been taken efficiently and realistically into account either in development strategies or in development policies. (Lopez and Pollack, 1989)"

The third comment relates to Zaire and hints that very great stresses and challenges to survival in times of instability may in fact provide women with an opportunity. An ActionAid worker makes the following perceptive comment:

"In Zaire, the principal characteristic is the shrinkage in the competence, credibility and probity of the state . . . The most important response by civil society to the mechanism of predatory accumulation that Zaire has become is withdrawal into a plethora of survival activities. The decay of the state has opened up new economic and social space, which explains the paradoxical boom of indigenous NGOs in a totalitarian environment.

This new space is the realm where women express creativity as they now play the leading role in the parallel markets . . . "

These three diagnoses of very different situations, against an apparently uniform backcloth of women's obligations, subjugation and indigence indicate that very different educational strategies may be needed – very different types of literacy programme – to be of use to women in these three widely varying types of circumstance.

2.2. Literacy, education and development

The comment just made about strategies for education is borne out by Fagerlind and Saha (1989), who have produced the best review so far of the relationship between education and development:

"Although there is much which has been said about education and development, there is still much which we do not know . . . The fact that views have ranged from extreme optimism to cynicism and skepticism should not detract from a more realistic view of what education can and cannot do in furthering the economic growth and improvement of social life in all societies . . . it is not so much a question of whether one can be optimistic or pessimistic about education and development, but rather of knowing what kind of education is appropriate for what kind of development. We have tried to show that prescriptions are rarely *either-or* or *right-wrong*, but rather "under what conditions" and "for what purpose" are the education and development strategies to be implemented. Finally, *the decision as to what outcomes are to be desired is a political act* [my emphasis].

The fact is that educational strategies directed to the attainment of development objectives can be successful. However, the implementation of plans takes time, and the attainment of goals requires even longer. "

With regard to literacy in particular, I do not wish to repeat what has already been said in Chapter 1. Briefly, high literacy rates are characteristic of richer and more *developed* societies. This does not, obviously, mean that literacy is the cause of development, but certainly suggests that it is an important factor in development. In developed societies, illiteracy is seen not only as a deprivation of rights, but also as a waste of human talent which would otherwise be available for the country's benefit.

At the same time, literacy is almost essential for participation in modern political systems. In most countries (West Bengal is an important exception) there are no political decision-makers above the very local level who do not have some degree of literacy and numeracy.

The Overseas Development Administration has in recent years come out strongly on the value of literacy, saying that: "Literacy is vital to development. It provides the building blocks of education, which is in turn the key to individual, social and economic progress" and has undertaken to respond to overseas governments expressing their willingness to develop literacy programmes (ODA 1990). The ODA affirms its awareness of the overall benefits of adult literacy for those who may not have had the opportunity of state schooling, but also affirms that literacy is not an end in itself.

Arguments for literacy as such apply with equal force to literacy for women. Without literacy, women cannot use their potential talents fully for the benefit of the country, nor can they take part in decisions taken by political bodies which will affect their own lives.

2.3. Gender and education

The parts which women and men are acknowledged to play in society and the ways in which males and females are defined depend on attitudes, values and beliefs and in particular on beliefs about their biological differences. Such beliefs are projected onto expectations about who goes to school.

In many societies formal schooling is regarded as primarily the prerogative of boys and young men. Girls who start to go may be removed by their parents (one of the case-studies from Bangladesh mentions a woman recollecting going to school for two days before being removed). But in very many cases girls do not get access to school at all. A Nepalese woman, Savitri, is described in the ActionAid case-study. She says bitterly:

"Our parents never sent us to schools – not the done thing. And worse still, it never entered our heads to even question them why. We led

mindless lives – if sent for grass we would go to the forest to get grass, or to fetch water or firewood or domestic chores – and so life went on. Then I got married and that was that. ❞

A prevailing culture which ascribes schooling to males can have a negative effect on efforts at women's literacy. In the 1970s, in Andhra Pradesh in India, the Council for Social Development found that functional literacy was a failure in comparison to straight health education without any literacy admix. The explanations seem to have been, first, that the women saw literacy as a male skill, to do with urban clerical employment and thus of no use to them, and secondly that men saw literacy as their prerogative, so were unwilling to allow their wives to participate. There are still some areas in India where primary schooling is seen as a deterrent to marriage for girls. A survey in Madhya Pradesh, reported in the Times of India of January 14th, 1991, showed that schooling there was seen as a condition of marriage for boys, but a barrier to marriage for girls.

Incidentally, the idea that literacy is a male property does not apply only to Western-style school literacy. In West Africa, the Vai system of writing is passed on informally, entirely outside the school system, from males to males.

Apart from a culture which sees literacy and schooling as male and an instrument of male mobility into the wage-earning sector, another factor which inhibits the sending of girls to school is the higher opportunity costs which would be incurred. The contribution of girls to the household, in terms of domestic chores, fetching of firewood and water etc. is in general too valuable to let them go to school instead.

It is thus not surprising that there are differentials in literacy between males and females. Table 5 shows how the gaps vary in different regions of the world.

Table 5. Percent of population ages 15 and above with no education

Region	Males %	Females %	Difference in % points
Sub-Saharan Africa	46.0	57.7	11.7
Middle East/North Africa	48.0	72.2	24.2
South Asia	51.4	65.0	13.6
East Asia/Pacific	9.7	20.7	11.0
Latin America/Caribbean	20.2	24.3	4.1

Source: Stromquist, 1989. Adapted from Kaneko, 1987.

There are reasons, as given in Chapter 1, why this is not satisfactory. For one thing, as Fagerlind and Saha (1989) so trenchantly say:

❝ Women provide more health care than all health services combined, yet outnumber men among the world's illiterates. ❞

Even when girls do go to school – and official statistics nowadays suggest that most do – there are lower female continuation rates. The UNDP (1990) reports the following average enrolments for countries categorised as Low Human Development:

Table 6. Educational profiles, Low Human Development countries (average)

Gross enrolment ratios	Male	Female
Primary	92.0	67.0
Secondary	37.0	20.0
Tertiary	9.3	3.8

It emerges from all this that the education of women would be an appropriate activity for the attraction of considerably more international aid.

2.4. Educational aid policies

The share of education in the world's total official development assistance is rather small and has declined since the days of the 1960s, when it was seen as a universal panacea. According to Hallak, 1990, education at the end of the 1980s was attracting 11% of bilateral aid and 5% of multilateral aid. British educational aid was somewhere in between. Figures given by Mrs Lynda Chalker, the Overseas Development Minister, in answer to a Parliamentary question on June 5th 1990, and some additional information in the ODA pamphlet on aid for literacy (1990), suggest that the British educational aid allocation was about 7% of the development budget.

This type of analysis does not of course tell the whole story. Some official aid to other sectors such as health may incorporate some educational work and NGOs also use some of their resources for education of varying kinds. Nevertheless, it is clear that education has recently been relatively low on the aid priority list, in the world at large and also in Britain. Genuinely intersectoral thinking on out-of-school education, such as was encouraged by the Commonwealth Nonformal Education Conference in New Delhi in 1979 (see Fordham, 1980) still seems quite uncommon. The survey of Joint Funding Projects revealed little interest in education

Literacy projects must take into consideration the role of women and children in family life. If access points are flexible then everyone in the community has a chance to benefit.

among the sponsors of health programmes, for instance.

The Minister has suggested, however, that the consequence of the world conference on Education for All might well encourage more educational aid and she commented on the conference's emphasis on:

> "The role of education throughout the whole range of social, technical and economic development."

If there is an increase in general educational aid, donors could do worse than follow the "Ten Commandments" suggested by Hallak in his recent book, *Investing in the Future* (1990):

> "1. Make education and human resource development (HRD) a top priority for international aid;
> 2. Adopt a global concept of HRD;
> 3. Establish support to HRD within the framework of national development policies and firm mutual commitment;
> 4. Widen the time-horizon of international cooperation in education;
> 5. Focus on long-term extension and improvement of receiving countries' institutional capacities;
> 6. Ensure financial sustainability of HRD policies;
> 7. Support strategic areas of educational sector management;
> 8. Improve administrative machinery of the countries concerned;
> 9. Support South-South cooperation;
> 10. Promote coordination and organizational integration in international cooperation."

The key phrase is *human resource development*, which is a broader concept than education and embraces comfortably both literacy work and women's programmes. The comments

about a wider time-horizon and long-term institutional improvement are both relevant to women's literacy. Some impacts of literacy can be seen at once, but many of the most important ones must be presumed to show up in the longer term. Malnourished children will not cease to be so overnight, for instance, however quickly their mothers grasp basic nutritional lessons.

Within human resource development, women's education has had a place in national policies and both multilateral and bilateral aid policies. While, as has been said earlier, rhetoric is often stronger than practice, several European aid donors give a measure of priority to women's programmes and try to ensure a consciousness of gender in all aid activities. An example is the ODA's set of guidelines for Joint Funded Projects (see Appendix 3, Checklist for Participation of Women in Development Projects).

Literacy has not featured much in recent official British Aid – in 1988, 17% of education capital aid and 2.7% of education technical assistance went to primary education and literacy combined. That is, the amount spent on literacy and primary education together was 0.17% of total official aid. One explanation for this would seem to be the ODA's declared policy that "it is, in the end, up to overseas governments to decide how much of their total resources, including donor assistance, they wish to allocate to basic education, as against the many other pressing needs they have" (ODA 1990). This is a wholly defensible stance, but is not in line with practice in some other areas of British aid, nor with practice among some other donors, such as Sweden and Germany which encourage more emphasis on adult basic education (and on affirmative action for women) in their negotiations with recipient governments. It is one contention of this report that the British Government could make a greater emphasis on women's literacy as a strongly encouraged component of all educational aid packages.

Another reason for the lack of enthusiasm for literacy in British official aid may be a slightly limited vision of what the potential of literacy might be. The ODA's 1990 pamphlet on aid for literacy asserts, rather astonishingly, that:

> "Adults who attain literacy need to apply it for economic activity and/or continuing education in order to sustain their newly acquired literate state."

This seems a rather jejune and arid view. It is hypothesised in this report that literacy may be applied (as well as for economic activity) to the promotion of better health and nutrition, a better quality of human interchange in family and community and a greater individual self-realisation.

It is assumed that there may in any event be some shift in British aid policy towards literacy and basic education (including women's literacy) as a result of the agreements reached at the Jomtien conference. One of the six components of the Framework for Action approved by the conference was:

> "Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) to, say, one-half of its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates."

The discussion has been focused on official aid. Little can be said about NGO aid priorities since the information is not so accessible. It is indeed questionable whether many NGOs are aware of what proportion in their budgets goes to literacy work.

For both governments and NGOs, a literacy policy should be two-pronged, directed in part to education of adults in the community and in part to the strengthening and expansion of schooling. Literacy aid, particularly aid to women's literacy, has to take account of a range of possible obstacles to success. The main ones are:

a. Absence of a political will;
b. Unsympathetic public opinion;
c. Lack of resources;
d. Lack of motivation;
e. Lack of opportunities for new literates to apply their skills (e.g. absence of appropriate reading matter).

2.5. Some statistics

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish a context for the investigation of women's literacy, by looking briefly at women's situation in developing countries in relation to literacy and education and in the context of current aid policies. The discussion ought also to have some statistical grounding and an attempt is made here to provide it.

Before reporting on literacy statistics, some caveats are necessary. There is an inherent unreliability in official statistics about literacy. Literacy activity in many countries is done by persons conscripted through national service schemes or some form of mobilisation (e.g. of university students or secondary school pupils or army recruits). It is not in their interest to report failures. The example of Mexico emerges in Archer and Costello (1990). There literacy teaching is carried out by *promoters* who are secondary school students doing the work as part of their compulsory social service and if they could not report success, they would

fail themselves. Archer and Costello quote one promoter as saying:

> **"We were forced to lie. If we did not have 12 people enrolled and an 80% pass rate then we were threatened with failing our social service. So we lied to make it easier for ourselves and INEA workers would never come to check up, because they wanted to believe our lies: it looked good for them. It was deceit from the bottom up."**

[Note: INEA = The National Institute of Adult Education]

Even where there is no conscious deception, all too often gross enrolment figures are used, without any serious attempt to look at sustained learning or at outcomes. After the 1985 Colombian literacy campaign, it was claimed that a million people had been made literate in a year. That was, however, merely the number of people who had said that they would enrol (in fact many never even enrolled). An objective observer estimated that a realistic figure for those who did become literate through the campaign was probably nearer to 50,000. This is in itself an important achievement, but the numbers were simply nowhere near what was claimed.

A different kind of pitfall is to do with comparability. The Unesco definition mentioned earlier provides some kind of yardstick, but the tests on which literacy achievements are based do vary from country to country. Official returns are usually simply globalised and do not indicate for instance, how many men and how many women are literate in particular languages (as we have seen, a matter of great importance in terms of access to power).

Further, as an Indian woman writer has pointed out, many people reported as literate, since they have passed the tests, do not use their literacy skills at all and are therefore to all intents and purposes still functionally illiterate (Karkal in Mahadevan, 1989).

Such doubtfully accurate figures, when passed on to international bodies, may be accepted uncritically. Occasionally, international analysis may be faulty as well. Stromquist (1989), for instance, when trying to assess the dimensions of women's education had to rework the World Bank's figures in their 1987 *Education Composition of the World's Population.*

For all these reasons, national and international literacy statistics are about orders of magnitude and hints of general trends, rather than accurate descriptions of the situation. In realisation of all these limitations, the following general statements are offered:

1. In 1960, of all the world's illiterates, 58% were estimated to be women; in 1985, of all the world's illiterates, 63% were estimated to be women;
2. The absolute number of the world's illiterates rose between 1960 and 1985 by 154 million and of those, 133 million were female;
3. 20% of all school age children in developing countries are not in school, but 40% of school age girls are not.

Table 5 has already indicated the overall percentages of populations over 15 with no (known) education, showing the disparity between men and women. The following table, derived from *The Human Development Report 1990,* shows the size of the task if the Jomtien targets are to be reached by halving the general adult illiteracy rate by the year 2000 and bringing women up to the general average. The last column shows how long it will take for women to reach parity if no extra effort is made – and for 7 out of the 12 countries listed the chilling forecast is that it will take at least a century.

Table 7. Implications of Jomtien literacy targets

Required annual illiteracy reduction rates for whole population and for women (selected countries with low human development)

Country	Illiteracy rate,whole population 1985 (%)	Annual % reduction needed to halve it by year 2000	Female illiteracy rate 1985 (%)	Annual % reduction needed to reach parity by year 2000	Year in which parity reached if past reduction rate unchanged
Niger	86	4.75	91	5.11	2100+
Sierra Leone	70	4.97	79	5.70	2072
Somalia	88	4.73	94	5.17	2100+
Burundi	65	4.96	73	5.66	2048
Mozambique	61	5.04	78	6.56	2100+
Sudan	77	4.69	85	5.35	2100+
Nepal	74	4.86	88	5.95	2100+
Bangladesh	67	4.78	78	5.74	2096
Nigeria	57	5.10	69	6.25	2051
Yemen AR	75	5.02	93	6.37	2100+
India	57	4.82	71	6.16	2100+
Kenya	40	5.65	51	7.17	2022

Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 1990

A DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

3.1. What kind of literacy programmes for women?

The picture painted at the end of the last chapter inspires a sense of urgency. If, as Table 7 hints, present rates of literacy increase will only lead to women attaining parity with men in many countries in a century's time, talk of equity or of women coming out of the shadows becomes hollow.

In the light of that urgency, if more aid and attention are to be given to women's education, how can we be sure that programmes will be effective? Here, we look at the possible nature of such programmes and try to reach an understanding of what obstacles stand in the way of women's literacy, then an understanding of what ways there are of fostering women's motivation and using the literacy skills of some women to encourage and benefit others.

We have seen that while poor and non-literate women face many common problems, they may experience a very great diversity of social, cultural and political environments. It would, therefore, be pointless to aim at one universally applicable model of literacy programme. Some general principles, however, should be taken into consideration. Summarising them may appear prescriptive, but the principles which follow are based on the convergent verdicts of very many literacy workers and researchers.

First, to talk about literacy programmes *for* women already begs a question: are there occasions when women and men set out to learn literacy together? Very often, there are cultural reasons not to attempt this. The Nepal case-study explained that women are considered unclean for four days during menstruation. They had solved the problem by arranging separate seating for themselves, but an atmosphere of quarantine could not be conducive to serious learning. Although there may be times when – and places where – learning together is appropriate, women would usually be better served, at least initially, by separate courses or programmes. This is partly because curricula are then more likely to serve their immediate needs. The ActionAid case-study of Nepal reports that in the Surkhat Valley literacy campaign male participants scored slightly higher than females and the judgement was that this was because of the *existing instructional styles and contents* – i.e. the work was not really appropriate for the women's concerns. More critically, women only literacy programmes can be theirs, rather than *for* them. Secondly, any women's literacy programme ought to be developmental, seen and designed as part of a process of continuing education, which could lead learners from one subject to another (e.g. agriculture to nutrition) or from one language to another. There is merit in the possibility of evolution from less formal to more formal learning, including the prospect of a route into, say, further education institutions. Literacy courses then have to be proxies for primary education, such as happens in some Nigerian states, where literacy courses are structured so that they can be certificated as primary-school leaving equivalents.

Thirdly, literacy must be *functional* – not necessarily *work-oriented*, but in the sense that the learning of literacy and numeracy is combined with the learning of some other desired knowledge. It is arguable that this is the best way to increase women's motivation and to enable them to make best use of the limited time which they can afford to devote to any educational activity. At the same time, part of the functional element of any literacy course must be to assist women to take greater control. Functional literacy projects are often linked, for obvious reasons, to income-generation, but some suspicion has grown up, where women do the work but where the organisation, marketing and so on are in the hands of men, then the profits are likely to find their way into those hands too. Literacy with a socio-economic content must include training of women in management of their projects and in how to mobilise their own resources.

Fourthly, the style and process of literacy teaching must take account of learners' adult status and interests, and should include dialogue, but as Archer and Costello (1990) hint in the passage quoted in 1.3., the dialogue should not become disconnected from the literacy endeavour.

3.2. What hinders women from becoming literate?

> "The obstacles to the full participation of women in development form one of the greatest challenges in international aid. (ODA, 1989)"

Many of the obstacles to women's participation in development are also constraints on their participation in literacy. It must be said that there are barriers in the way of both men and women wishing to embark on the literacy process, but there are special problems facing women.

Two very substantial problems in many cases are:
1. Lack of political will in male-dominated governments; and
2. Positive opposition of men in some cultural contexts.

Even where there has been a political impetus, it may falter. The ActionAid case study of Somalia reported that the interest of government in literacy in general and women's literacy in particular had been greatly reduced. There may actually be

government antagonism to literacy work by NGOs if such work can be seen as threatening the existing social order in which women are subordinated. It seems to have been suspicion of this kind which led to the closure by the Burundi Government of the Catholic Church's literacy programme in 1986.

Educated male prejudice is encapsulated in an African comment to Rene Dumont (1962): "If your sister goes to school, your next meal will be your fountain pen".

Basic cultural pressures may be assumed as the explanation of the fact that when one ODA/NGO project was led to the conclusion (somewhat reluctantly, since it had not been part of their initial objectives) that they should set up a girls' school for the refugee camps in Baluchistan, the organisers were unable to find a single literate woman in the camps to act as a teacher. A less drastic case was reported in an ODA/NGO project in India. A three year people's education programme encompassing literacy, construction and other community development work failed in three years to find a woman facilitator to work on women's literacy (in this case there were some literate women, but they were not ready to come forward in such a role).

A vivid example of male opposition was described by Micere Mugo (1989):

> "Between 1979 and 1982 I experimented with a small voluntary literacy campaign project involving women from Kibera, one of Nairobi's huge slums. One day my best student, a mother of six, turned up at my house, where I held the classes, with a swollen face and badly damaged nose.
>
> Her husband had come home and had been infuriated to find her reading a book. Describing the activity as a reflection of idleness and a sign of unwomanly conduct, the man warned his wife that she was never again to be caught, at any time of day or night, reading a book. This was the kind of thing done by schoolchildren and not by grown-up married women, he said. He had beaten her up thoroughly – just to drive the message home. In fact, with only two exceptions, all the students attended these private classes under strict secrecy."

Other problems impeding women's literacy are the multifarious demands on their time and energies, as described earlier. The ActionAid Gambia report said:

> "What became apparent was that the women are definitely interested in the literacy classes, but because of their numerous responsibilities, they could hardly find time to attend classes."

Long working hours have already been instanced. The ActionAid Director in Burundi calculates that in Muyinga Province, women work some 74 hours a week on average, compared to men's 32 hours. With such time problems, it is not surprising that one comes across such sad tales as that which Stephanie Urdang (1989) tells of a Mozambique village, Tres de Fevereiro:

> "164 enrolled for the literacy classes, 37 for adult education, almost all women. But none sat for the exams. The literacy monitor, a concerned older man, was very discouraged.
>
> When he asked his students why they stopped coming, they told him that they had too much work to do. Two hours a day for literacy training is a large chunk out of a woman's workday. He didn't seem quite convinced that this was sufficient reason . . . But he was also sympathetic. 'Sometimes the students leave their [farms] and come directly to class. They have no time to do their homework, they're tired and their minds are still with their fields. Then they can't keep up and they lose interest'."

Family obligations, whether to children or to husband may also stand in the way of women who would otherwise be interested in literacy. Stephanie Urdang also quotes a woman factory worker in Maputo:

> "I really want to study, but social conditions don't make this possible . . . I'm alone there at the house. I don't have any household help. If I study here, I'll get home only at 9 or 10 at night. My husband is without food or water. He could decide to get another woman, saying 'this woman is prepared to cook for me. You don't want to'."

There are various other sorts of difficulty, including the impossibility, for poor women, of travelling any distance for a literacy programme. Often, a male instructor is inhibiting. The underlying problem, however, is that expressed as a general judgement on literacy programmes provided in Nepal both by government and NGOs:

> "All activities lack women's perception, which . . . hinders active women's participation in literacy programmes."

3.3. Motivation and encouragement

In spite of all the barriers, impediments and active obstructions, there is widespread evidence that women are

ready and willing to come forward for literacy. In Africa, more women than men enrol in literacy classes, for instance between 70 and 90% of enrolled literacy learners are female in Botswana, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Lind, 1990). In Nepal, it is said:

> "It is not literacy activity which attracts women, but it is women who attract literacy activity first, because they are very positive towards it . . . Their enthusiasm towards learning is an example now in the country. So government is keen to do something."

In order to understand the issues in women's literacy, then, we should not look only at the obstructions to it, in order to find ways of overcoming them; we should also look at the motivations which women have or could have to involve themselves in literacy learning.

Some women are moved to volunteer for literacy because of indignities which illiteracy brings at the hands of bureaucracy – a problem more for urban than rural women. A Chilean shanty-dweller describes a typical brush with petty functionaries:

> "They humiliate someone who doesn't know how to read and write. When I went to register my newborn daughter, we had to write our names and I didn't know how. So I asked the person there to do it for me, but she refused and I had to insist on telling her I didn't know how to read and write." (ITFL Newsletter 1990, No 11)

The common phenomenon of rural-urban migration, dividing wives from husbands, leaves women with a consciousness of helplessness and also a desire for personal communication through letters. An Indian woman explained:

> "I basically joined the literacy centre because I wanted to be able to go somewhere on my own, without my husband. I found I couldn't move around because I couldn't read bus numbers or follow directions and people weren't helpful. Besides this, when I visited my village, I could neither send nor receive any letters. Now I've learned enough to at least write to my husband when I'm away. I also want my children to be literate and I can help them to be so when I am literate." (ITFL Newsletter 1990, No 11)

The implication is that women will make rational decisions to learn to read and write if they can see a practical benefit. The benefits may be personal, as in the two cases above. They may be economic. In the Nepal case-study, it is asserted that: "Women in general want to learn cash-making skills, particularly based on locally available resources, with market and financial facilities." Poona Wignaraja's book on Women, Poverty and Resources (1990) does not explicitly discuss the importance of literacy if poor women are to mobilise economic resources, but many of the enterprises he describes imply a need for literacy. For example, the Zimbabwe Savings Development Movement, now comprising over 5,700 clubs, with 200,000 members, can only function if there are enough literate members to operate the system of weekly meetings at which records are made of all savings and withdrawals.

Not all impulsion to read is economic. Still, in many parts of the world, religions based on holy literature constitute a strong reason why adherents want to read. In the Zaire case-study, the literacy programme described is church-based and is consciously aimed at helping learners to read the Bible. Women learners have managed, because of strong motivation, to attend classes, in spite of their heavy farming commitments.

A bouquet of reasons why women might want to learn to read came from a research study by Mary Opiyo of Kenya (1981). She found that women in a Lutheran Church literacy project had these reasons:

> "I could not read instructions for medicine.
> I do not want to look so stupid when they read the Bible or sing hymns in Church.
> When I take coffee berries to the cooperative society, I never know if what they record is really true.
> I never know if my child is cheating me when he says he has done his homework.
> I want to know Kiswahili because at the hospital or clinic the doctors and nurses are from other tribes. When they talk to me in Kiswahili I cannot explain my sickness."

Another Kenya report (prepared for International Literacy Year) includes further reasons. Actually finding one's way round a hospital is difficult if one cannot read. There are problems in handling such transactions as going to cash a postal order. And literacy brings confidentiality. As one Kenyan said: "My secrets are protected".

The conclusion from all this would seem to be that women are very often motivated to learn and need help to harness their drive to become literate and to overcome the stumbling blocks in their way. A second conclusion is that women's functional literacy programmes may have to include a

wide variety of knowledge elements, socio-cultural, economic, vocational. Little has been said so far about numeracy, but several of the reasons for women wanting to learn are reasons connected to numeracy as well.

3.4. Roles of literate women in women's literacy programmes

It has been said that male instructors may inhibit women learners, and that there is deep suspicion of economic-related literacy programmes which are organised and controlled by men. The Nepalese commentator has also lamented the absence of a female perspective.

It seems logical therefore that non-literate women should look to their literate sisters for partnership in travelling the literacy road. This is written in awareness that many educated women take no interest or are concerned with safeguarding their own privileges (it was extraordinary to hear middle-class Nigerian women lament Universal Primary Education because it would deprive them of cheap maids). Nevertheless, literate women with sympathy and requisite skills must be mobilised if any serious effort is to be made to reduce female illiteracy.

Very little has been written about the role of literate women in the furtherance of female literacy and for this reason, I stress that role here.

Rezaul Haque (in Duke, 1990), discussing a community health-care project in Bangladesh, describes the decision to train and use women paramedics. One reason was because it would obviously be easier for them to discuss female health problems intimately and frankly; but he also says: "a woman paramedic is a shining symbol of social transformation". That may sound poetic, but hundreds of thousands of women literacy workers would not only be shining symbols, they could be collectively a shining engine for transformation.

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Literate women are more likely to take control over their own lives and involve themselves in mobilising and managing credit to improve their family circumstances.

There are plenty of examples of educated women becoming aware of the limitations on their own and all women's rights in their societies. As the Indian Committee on the Status of Women concluded in 1979,

> "Large masses of women in this country have remained unaffected by the rights granted to them by the constitution and the laws enacted since Independence."

Many educated women have allied themselves with the less-educated to increase awareness of those rights and laws. In Latin America, feminists early on demanded social recognition of the intellectual capacity and worth of women. They fought for the idea of the educated woman as citizen and productive worker (not only as spouse or parent), and as a result they formed women's organisations to establish the *promotion* of women, going beyond welfare into literacy and providing the leadership in the implementation of community development. One example of this kind of organism is the Associación de Mujeres Costarricences (AMC) – the Costa Rica Women's Association.

In a very different environment, educated women have been the support of the highly successful South African Crafts Association. Individual craftswomen are able to market their products and get fair prices because they have combined to get themselves a central marketing organisation with computerised record- and book-keeping, and each local branch has scrupulous stewardship of revolving funds for loans. If educated women were not associated with the non-literate none of this could have happened. But it is recognised that the educated women must not become an oligarchy; and at the same time for practical reasons of quality production non-literate members are wanting to become both literate and numerate. Some educated members, including a retired inspector of schools, have taken up the development of a literacy programme. Impressively, she has included in her team of instructors some of the newly literate women in the association, so that the skills resource base has been widened and enriched. It is understood that there are similar examples among Palestinian women on the West Bank, in which educated women from Bir Zeit University have worked with non-literate women.

It is possible for teenage girls to involve themselves in women's literacy for development – although there may be problems in relationships owing to status in society etc. The official Unesco publication on ILY Year of Opportunity (1990) has a description of a very healthy involvement by a youth movement:

> "For the past forty years, the Pakistan Girl Guides Association has worked to give women and girls better access to agricultural training, literacy and knowledge of health and nutrition.
>
> In 1954, adult literacy centres for women and girls were opened as part of the first government urban development programme in a depressed area of Karachi. In 1957, one thousand Girl Guides participated in an adult literacy campaign based on an each-one-teach-one-scheme. Since then, the movement has blossomed. There are now fifty adult literacy centres run by the Girl Guides Association in both rural and urban centres. Women are invited to Guide rallies to learn about the history and culture of Pakistan through skits, dramas and speeches. Since 1957, 60,000 women have been trained in literacy and other skills, such as sewing, nutrition, child-care, hygiene, first aid and home nursing, poultry raising, vegetable growing and livestock keeping.
>
> Another noteworthy aspect of the campaign has been the setting up of highly successful literacy programmes in three jails for women. Literacy skills have helped in the rehabilitation of inmates by increasing both their skills and self-respect." ❞

The description mentions practical limitations on the scheme such as lack of funds and transport, but it is certainly a valuable illustration of how young educated women, strengthened by membership of an organisation, can usefully engage in literacy work.

The word *organisation* is important. Women's organisations and associations enveloping both literate and non-literate can provide confidence, strength and resources to all. They also provide continuity and sustained activity. It is, moreover, possible for educated women with a special interest in adult literacy to fortify themselves by banding together across national frontiers, after the style of the Women's Network of the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education. Its objects include the creation of "a resource pool of women adult educators and women who have given exemplary leadership at the grassroots." They are to keep in touch through personal correspondence and newsletters – that is, they can only communicate with each other because they are literate.

CONCLUSIONS FROM CASE-STUDIES

4.1. Literacy and change

In the next three chapters, the various case-studies are used to provide evidence of the effect of literacy programmes on social, economic and personal change. This is a slightly artificial division, since some of the most successful projects combined social and other objectives and the effects of literacy as such could not easily be isolated. They would almost certainly have been strengthened because, as the 1990 World Bank Report says: "Improvements in health, education and nutrition reinforce each other".

One ODA/NGO project in Hyderabad was designed to tackle illiteracy and also to promote alternative employment, a minimum wage and women's rights. Still at an early stage, it has identified animators for literacy, evolved village committees (separate ones for men and women) and mobilised some money to finance income-generating alternative employment. In such a case, literacy is an ingredient in the change programme, rather than a preliminary to it. The progression of change often seems to need literacy as one wheel of the cart, while the other wheels may be health education, labour-saving devices, alternative employment or other development-related activities.

In other cases, some other type of learning activity or community development activity preceded literacy. For example, one Kenya development project was to encourage goat-keeping, but the women leaders demanded the opportunity of literacy, in order to note down new knowledge for passing on to others. The acquisition of literacy skills then led to new projects and developments. There are thus a number of models of literacy intervention:

1. Literacy as a preliminary to change;
2. Literacy as an ingredient in a multi-faceted development programme which leads to change;
3. Change leading to a desire for literacy, which then leads to a desire for further change.

Bearing these variations in mind, one can still identify many instances of the first model, when women's literacy is the catalyst for other changes.

Table 8. Mothers' literacy, infant and toddler mortality (Rates per 1000)

	Infant Mortality		Toddler Mortality	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Illiterate	132	81	29	17
Literate – Primary level	64	49	4	2

(Data kindly supplied by Professor David Morley)

4.2. Women's literacy and human well-being

What the 1990 World Bank Report asserts of education seems, from all the available evidence, to be true of women's literacy too. It says:

> "The effectiveness of education as a weapon in the fight against poverty goes well beyond productivity in the labour market. One year of mother's education has been associated with a 9% decrease in under five mortality. The children of better-educated mothers, other things being equal, tend to be healthier."

Women's literacy showed in many cases as having an important effect on infant mortality and on child survival through better nutrition, immunisation and the capacity to apply such life-saving techniques as oral rehydration therapy.

The case-studies here bore out UNICEF evidence on a link between literacy and infant mortality. In a sample of women in rural Sierra Leone, 70% of the non-literate had experienced the deaths of children under two years old, while 45% of the literate had had such an experience. 45% is still sadly high, and all such rural women remain handicapped by the absence of medical support services, but it still represents a visible improvement. An Indian study in Hyderabad came up with these results as shown above.

The difference between mortality rates in rural and urban communities again is probably owing to differential access to health services. But the main point is the very big difference between both infant and toddler mortality where the mother is literate. UNICEF researchers, from Caldwell onwards, have provided evidence that every additional year of a mother's schooling is associated with a fall of nine per thousand in the Infant Mortality Rate.

During this study, I did not come across any data linking female literacy to reduced maternal mortality. This is a subject for further attention since reproduction-related problems are either the first or second cause of death for women aged between 15 and 45 in developing countries (Bolton and others, 1989). The chances of a woman in rural Africa or Asia dying from a reproduction-related cause are 1 in 25, whereas in Europe they are one in several thousand. One cause of many female deaths in developing countries is abortion, owing to its illegality. This suggests the value, in terms of saving lives, of some knowledge of contraception. The point is taken up in 4.3.

Returning to child health and survival, there was good evidence of the

favourable impact of women's literacy. The Nepal case-study reported that women who had learned to read "looked after their children properly" and also that they "kept their houses clean" (which should make for improved family health). More concretely, an ODA/NGO slum health project in Mysore, with a literacy component, led to increasing numbers of women bringing their children forward for immunisation, as did the YWCA literacy project in Madras.

Similarly, a research project based on the Alexandra Health Centre and University Clinic in the North Transvaal (South Africa) discovered a correlation between women's literacy and immunisation. Only just over 60% of women living in the surrounding neighbourhoods brought their children to the Centre for immunisation and the researchers identified 4 factors which made women less likely to bring their children; one of these was *poor literacy*. Sister Legora Marumo, who was closely involved, informed me personally that follow-up research had produced further evidence of a link between women's literacy and a commitment to immunisation.

Immunisation is a provision of health services. Much child health care depends on the home. One home health measure which can ensure survival and which is part of UNICEF's package of Child Survival Initiatives is Oral Rehydration Therapy. It is regarded as safer and cheaper than using commercial anti-diarrhoea medicines and Molla and Molla (1990) suggest that the lives of 5 million children a year could be saved if mothers understood its use. Because it is a simple therapy, instructions can be learned and memorised by non-literate women, but it is more likely to be practiced by the literate who have a note of the quantities. A young Cambodian woman's testimony was that: "Knowing how to read can save lives".

She had had the confidence (and the written instructions) to mix the home remedy of salt, sugar and water in the proper quantities and thus helped her child to overcome the effects of dehydration. She also explained that she had no parents from whom she could learn how to look after children and that she was too poor to buy medicine, so that she had to have recourse to books (Unesco, 1990).

There is also strong evidence for better child nutrition resulting from women's literacy and the 1990 World Development Report comments that:

> "Better nutrition improves the child's capacity to learn. Studies in many developing countries (China, India and Kenya amongst others) consistently show that protein energy malnutrition is related to lower cognitive-test scores and worse school performances."

Besides having a greater capacity to learn, children of literate women are more likely to get a chance to exercise that capacity in school. Non-literate women do usually have an understanding of the value of school. The Sierra Leone study actually showed non-literate women setting a higher value on school than the literate, but in all the other relevant cases, mothers' literacy brought increased sensitivity to school and was a positive influence in a family. Boys and girls were encouraged to attend regularly and to continue attending – a consequence of literacy noticed by Kasnaju and Manandhar in Carron and Bhola 1985. If, however, enthusiasm for school is to be kept up, there may need to be some improvement in the quality of what schools have to offer. An Indian ActionAid worker commented: "the unattractive school atmosphere and methods and a hopeless curriculum repel the parents and also the children from the school".

Here are some examples of the direct effects of women's literacy:
1. Nepal – an income-generating project with a literacy component led to some girls enrolling in schools for the first time;
2. Sudan – Women's and children's projects, again with a literacy element, led (among other outcomes) to the establishment of a kindergarten;
3. Brazil – A literacy project for prostitutes was followed by the women opening a school in a local favela for their own and other local children (this outcome was not particularly emphasised or taken notice of by the NGO managing the project);
4. Nepal – the Action Aid study reported that literate women helped their children with their homework.

4.3. Women's literacy and family planning

There is, thus, little doubt that if a woman is literate, this will favourably affect the survival chances, health and education of her children and that this will be the case whether she becomes literate through schools or as an adult.

In another health-related area, family planning, the case is not immediately so clear. The World Bank's conclusion is:

> "At low levels of education a few extra years of schooling may actually lead to increased fertility, but after that there is a strong negative effect."

On the whole, where cultural factors against family planning do not come into play, the evidence from a diversity of countries is that, over time, access to more than a few years of

Literate mothers are more likely to send their children to school.

schooling has a strong effect on family size.

Caldwell (1979) found not only that women's schooling had a measurable impact on family size in Nigeria, but also that women's schooling had three times the impact of men's schooling. Tuan (in Mahadevan, 1989) found that the fertility of non-literate women in China in 1981 was more than twice as high as that of women who had a *college education*. Arshat and Yatim (also in Mahadevan, 1989) report that in Malaysia contraception was used by 40% of women with primary schooling as compared with 22% of women with none.

Such data relates to schooling and not to adult women's literacy. Further, it mostly relates to the late 1970s and early 1980s, before the full impact in a number of countries of structural adjustment, which will have left more women without access to contraception, because family planning services have been reduced and poverty has left many unable to afford the materials. But women's literacy certainly seems to be one important variable in the reduction of family size – whereas men's literacy does not have the same weight.

What cases there are suggest that the same sort of effects could be expected where adult women become literate. If women's literacy is part of a continuum of continuing education, it should be possible to avoid the dichotomy reported by the World Bank between women with a little learning and those with more. The ActionAid Sierra Leone report showed that both literate and non-literate women

expressed a preference for smaller families and all were aware of contraception, but the literate as a group were more in favour of its use.

Results from women's literacy programmes are likely to take longer to show up in changes in family-planning behaviour than in child-health behaviour. It was reported in the Zaire case-study, that after five years of women's literacy work in Kivu, the average family size remained eight children. Among older women who have already had their own families, the influence of literacy on family size would have to be indirect – on their daughters. Direct effects can be expected from literacy programmes for younger women, associated with non-educational measures such as access to contraceptive provision and in environments where there are no overwhelming cultural pressures against family planning.

The testimony of several Nepalese is that they have gained an understanding of the issues in control over family size. They also express a conviction of the wrongness of child marriage – which obviously leads to larger families as well as to poor maternal health. The following individual comments by newly-literate women are illuminative:

"**Savitri**: I feel sad to see such young girls getting married off. Those girls who do not even have the sense to wear clothes properly – what can they understand about marriage and life? If they are educated and they are of age, they will be able to manage their lives much better." She described how she was able to stop one such child marriage taking place: "I immediately went to her house and spoke to the mother and tried to convince her that what she was about to do was wrong. I explained to her that it is we women who are responsible for our own present condition and we too are responsible for the continuing of this evil custom in our society. If we are going to continue to encourage this custom our daughters will never get a better life. Fortunately, the mother was convinced enough to stop the marriage. I am glad I was able to help in preventing the life of another little girl from being ruined."

"**Maiya**: I shall make sure that my children are educated. And I shall make sure that I have a small family of whom I can well take care. In order to have a healthy and happy family, I know it is in our hands to contain the number of children to one or two.

I am not at all in favour of child marriages. I too was married off when I was only 11 years old. When I think back, I don't know whether to laugh or to cry. I hate it when I think of how my childhood was ruined by this bad custom. My younger sister is 12 years old and already she has had several offers of marriage. But I have told my parents that they will not marry her off as they did me. My parents too now feel that a girl should be married only at the right age, when she is mature. I even scold my neighbours whenever I hear that such a marriage has been arranged. I tell them off!"

These are both young women who have experienced quite short literacy courses. Unlike school curricula, these courses started from discussion of issues in adult experience, which not only brought literacy skills within a few months but also helped the participants to evaluate their society in terms of their own lives. It is clear that this type of literacy programme can have an immediate and sustained effect on women's opinions and behaviour in matters which will determine family size (as well as possible access to schooling for those girls who would otherwise have been married off). Such women seem ready to take on received and previously accepted customs. It may well be that in many other places women are only accepting of cultural pressures against family planning because they have not had their awareness raised through literacy. Such evidence as we have suggests that it would be worth linking literacy with family planning. This is for the quite practical reason that world population needs to be brought into balance with the environment, for the social reason that excessive child bearing is deleterious to a woman's health and for the reason of equity that in many circumstances the knowledge of contraception can be a factor in women's empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS FROM CASE-STUDIES

5.1. Literacy and the nature of women s involvement in the economy

Heavy workloads in the subsistence and unremunerated economy leave rural women with fewer options for other types of economic activity. Urban women, too, often have to spend time in unremunerated tasks such as fetching water. In the early 1980s, the World Health Organisation estimated that 45% of urban populations did not have water supplies connected to their dwellings, and of that 45% less than half were served by public stand-pipes.

Such considerations have led to an interest in ways in which women can earn income in less formal sectors with flexible working hours, controlled by the women themselves, such as production of saleable goods at home or individual petty trading. The problem which has already been mentioned is that if such operations are to be taken out of ultimate control by men, women need independent organisation, skills such as marketing and access to credit for themselves . (Credit is a problem for women in most countries. Several of the cases looked at here stress this. The ActionAid Somalia report, for instance, says that some women are now beginning to have some opportunities for borrowing, but that it is still much more difficult for a woman to get a loan of any size than it is for a man.)

In all three areas, organisation for production, marketing and mobilising credit, it can be hypothesised that literacy would be helpful. This chapter looks at the impact of literacy on women's economic activities. Some useful pointers were found. Rather more than in the health and family arena, the process of change in women's economic life may often precede the demand for literacy, and literacy in turn may impel further change (the third model mentioned at the start of Chapter 4), but several examples were found of literacy leading to new economic organisation and activity.

An ODA/NGO literacy project in Marsabit, Kenya, although not exclusively for women, mainly enrolled women and one reported outcome has been the establishment of "small self-help projects". In Zimbabwe, the operation of ALOZ (the Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe) has led to the formation of literacy groups, which are becoming production units, rearing poultry, cultivating mushrooms etc. The YWCA literacy project in Madras resulted in literate women setting up and successfully managing a cooperative grinding unit.

A more extended description comes from the Zaire report. The Elimu (learning) organisation in Kivu developed literacy classes for women in which the curriculum was based on the encouragement of women to take more control over production and distribution.

As a result four women's organisations were formed and the story of how one group struggled to develop new economic activity is instructive. The story is told by a member, Esperance Mukamusoni:

> "First we started learning how to read and write in 1986. We realized that we women could bring about progress here in Kalimabenge. We wondered what to do. We decided to club together with 20 zaires each per month. We were able then to buy a piece of land to grow vegetables, which we then would sell. The spot was exposed to too much sun and we lost.
>
> We acquired another piece of land in a better place, but our efforts didn't lead to anything, because we didn't know how to store our produce properly. We gathered again and decided to club together with more money. We could reach a total of Z.11,250. We then decided to start our grocery business . . . That was in 1988. When we did the latest stock-taking in April 1990, our profits were Z.500,000. Our first two shop assistants, who were both men, stole Z.38,200, but we sacked them. No-one can cheat us any more . . . "

Not for nothing was the writer called Esperance, or Hope! The story is encouraging in the persistence shown by the women, and it could well be that their new literacy gave them the confidence to persevere, in spite of misfortunes and cheats. It is also, however, indicative of the limitations of literacy without further sorts of knowledge, such as the importance of a proper survey (and perhaps soil analysis) before buying agricultural land, modern agricultural techniques using quick-growing shade plants, and simple, effective storage methods.

There were rather more examples of projects where women realised a need for literacy after they became involved in new income-generating projects (usually initiated from outside), for instance ODA/NGO projects in Nepal and India. Perhaps the clearest example of economic activity progressing to literacy and beyond is that, already alluded to, of the Crafts Association in South Africa, made up of twenty women's craft groups in Transvaal and Orange Free State (with one associated group in Swaziland). One group is called, tellingly, Operation Hunger. The groups banded together for marketing and other backup services and began to see a need for literacy for a range of reasons.

In the rural areas, where they were producing textiles, they had to mobilise skills in design and printing and had to acquire knowledge of measurement. Having begun literacy with a

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Children of literate women have a greater chance of survival as literate mothers are more likely to present their children for immunisation and medical attention.

straightforward utilitarian aim, moving into literacy then catalysed their expressed interest to learn more about their own cultures and society. They said that this was because they wanted to understand how they could gain greater parity with men. In the urban groups, again literacy was wanted for very practical reasons, such as keeping accounts and communicating with customers, both orally (through Afrikaans or English) and in writing. With these groups too, the acquisition of literacy widened the members' horizons, so that they began to look for opportunities of health education (they mentioned the understanding of AIDS, TB and cancer) and to learn more about personal care. The whole enterprise has visibly given the women more confidence and it has brought them to a level of organisation which strengthens their position both economically and within their societies.

Because economic activity beyond a certain point is bound to lead to a demand for literacy, a number of women's projects do combine new enterprise with literacy. Among ODA/NGO projects, examples include a well-established one in Belize and several for disadvantaged women in India ("tribals" and harijans). Some of the Indian projects are specifically targeted to the reduction of indebtedness, while one in Hyderabad reported that the women members were able to secure loans from the banks.

5.2. Women's literacy and access to credit

The juxtaposition in the last paragraph of the reduction of indebtedness with the ability to borrow from banks is not as strange as it might look. Poor people are often at the mercy of unscrupulous money lenders because they are not able to raise credit through banks or through other regulated systems, such as credit and savings unions. One ingredient in women's self-help is undoubtedly the capacity to mobilise credit and in some societies there are recognised traditional ways of doing this. In Western Africa, there are women's organisations specifically for this purpose, sometimes labelled *tontines*, though this is a slightly

misleading description. Subscribers pay in an agreed sum each week or month and on each occasion, one woman takes out all the payments; this enables her to have access to a large sum every so often, to make a major purchase or clear off a debt such as children's school expenses. This seems to work well for both literate and non-literate – and may be one reason why the ActionAid Sierra Leone report found that none of the women, whether educated or not, made use of a bank.

Other methods of saving or borrowing do tend to require some literacy – this has been said already of the Zimbabwe Women's Savings Development Movement.

Banks are intimidating places for poor and uneducated people and very often bank functionaries put barriers in their way. Anita Dighe (in Duke, 1990) describes what happened when the now well-known Indian Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) wanted to save their money in a bank:

> "How can women who cannot even sign their name have a bank account?" the bank officials asked. When it was realised that the members of the executive committee of the bank were required to sign the registration papers, all eleven members, in a singular display of determination, sat up through the night to learn how to sign their names without error. "

Subsequently, SEWA set up its own cooperative bank and methods have been found, by using personal photographs, to enable non-literate members to deposit and withdraw.

Nevertheless some literate women are required to scrutinise accounts and keep records for all such associations and it is not surprising that in some ODA/NGO projects, e.g. in Ecuador, which were designed to encourage income generation, savings and literacy, the facilitators found themselves asked to include how to organise meetings in their literacy programme. The more members are literate, the more such organisations, whether for credit and savings or any other economic purpose, will be truly controlled by the members. Just as a group of non-literate women may be cheated by a literate man, so they may equally be powerless alongside a literate woman.

5.3. Some unanswered questions

While cases were found which demonstrated an interaction between women's literacy and economic organisation, income-generation in the non-formal sector and credit access, several of the questions raised in the introduction to this report remain unanswered. I have found no evidence of the effect of literacy on women's agricultural practices, and yet, since women play such important agricultural roles, this would be important to know. It could be hypothesised that schooled girls do not engage in farming, since education is seen as a means to other forms of employment, but if adult women whose main activity is in agriculture do become literate, presumably they would stay on the land. How far their practices and productivity would change would of course depend in part on whether they had access to agricultural extension services – still all too often operated by men and directed to men and to export crop production.

Little has also been found about literacy and wage-employment. One major study (Benavot, 1989) came to the conclusion that increased primary education affected the long-term prosperity of girls more than boys, but once again we are looking at schooling and not adult women's literacy. It could be that there is a pointer in one fact reported in the ActionAid Sierra Leone study that literate women were more likely than non-literate ones to engage in a subsidiary economic activity, such as trading.

It is known that there are many women wage-earners in Latin America and Asia and some parts of Africa who are engaged in unskilled jobs in the construction industry, carrying water, quarrying gravel, breaking stones etc. and others in factories. If they were literate, would this affect their output? It certainly might affect their capacity to organise against exploitation, as the next Chapter shows, but there is little information as to how literacy affects women wage-earners' economic behaviour.

At the very least, literacy should enable women to budget better and to keep track of their saving and spending. Among the cases looked at, keeping of household accounts is occasionally mentioned and was regarded as one important outcome of a women's literacy programme organised by the Nepal Ministry of Education. The FPAI literacy programme in Hayathagar, Hyderabad also specifically mentions that when women became literate they were able to plan their expenditure better.

In the course of looking at women's literacy and economic change, the issue of women and the environment was noticed. Although this research did not specifically include the subject, there were some hints that literacy reinforced women's capacity to care for the environment. Women's concerns for ecology and in particular for forests and water supply have been brilliantly discussed by Vandana Shiva (1988) and it would be well worth undertaking some research into the impact of literacy on women's care for forests, water supply and the environment generally.

CONCLUSIONS FROM CASE-STUDIES

6.1. Nature of the evidence

When this enquiry started, it seemed likely that the hardest part would be to establish a connection between literacy and women's self-realisation and consequent participation. As it happened, it proved to be relatively easy to find many examples of such a connection and the quantity of testimony was more than for other effects of literacy. The testimony was from male and female witnesses and from women participants in literacy programmes. There did not seem to be any particular relationship between the kind of literacy programme and the outcome of increased confidence and self-awareness. There did, however, seem to be stronger results in terms of community participation from programmes which included discussion of issues as well as literacy skills.

Such evidence is by its nature anecdotal and cannot be quantified in the way that some other categories of evidence used in this report can be (e.g. the outcome of literacy showing up in the numbers of women presenting their children for immunisation). It is however, sufficiently cumulative to be extremely convincing and should give encouragement to those who frame women's literacy projects with intentions like that of an ODA/NGO literacy project in the Yemen, which hopes to put into Yemeni women's hands "some of the tools which they need to develop their lives in ways which they see are appropriate".

6.2. Women's literacy and self-realisation

The stigmatising and often ill-treatment of non-literates by the educated, particularly educated functionaries, is one reason why anyone who becomes literate, especially in an urban environment, would experience a sense of release once they feel they have escaped from such stigma and also from accompanying inhibitions against independent actions. This was well expressed by a Mozambican woman speaking to Stephanie Urdang (1989):

> "With literacy, people don't earn more but everything they know is in their heads. They can go anywhere, do anything, ask for things, enter in. When people don't know reading and writing, they are afraid."

An appreciation of what literacy means in terms of release from fear is one of the ingredients in the persistence of a woman labourer in Rajasthan. The Shrinavastas (in Duke, 1990) tell the story, largely in her own words, of Rajkumari. She at first attended classes in literacy and sewing against both family opposition and the jeers of other villagers. But as she says, "Whoever got an answer from me would not have the courage to tease me the next time!". She describes how, at the literacy centre, "We got the opportunity of meeting and talking with other people and gained some knowledge of the outside world". She gives as advantages of being literate that "I gained a lot of confidence" and also "my ideas and arguing power have been on the increase". An example of how she used her arguing power will be given in the next section. Her own final assessment as to what she had learnt as a result of becoming literate was:

> "I have learnt the following:- to read and write; to realise the real position of women in society; that continued effort can undo the impossible; that indulging in developmental programmes assures continued increase in courage."

Rajkumari's character and the conviction of her experience show through in spite of a rather clumsy translation. Above all what emerges is her feeling that she has gained in courage – a word she uses three times.

Reading as enlightenment is the experience described by a Kenyan woman, Teresia Waithiegeni: "Reading for me was like magic . . . My eyes are now open, it is like I was in darkness before".

Male observers also comment on the changes in women's confidence brought about by the acquisition of literacy. The Nepal Ministry of Education believed that literacy had made women "more helpful, resourceful and practical", while the ActionAid Nepal report stated that one of the major changes in almost all the dozen projects surveyed was the women's increased self-confidence. Description of the results of literacy for women is taken further by Lagubi Tiagani of Papua New Guinea, discussing the Huli United Church Literacy Programme (in Wormald and Crossley, 1988):

> "In conclusion, I ask, why should women be literate? I believe literacy for women is important because they have shown a great sense of commitment to themselves, and because they can play an important role in the future development of their society. In the United Church literacy programme, I have seen the emergence of women leaders – most of whom have graduated from the literacy classes."

Besides the general point about literacy and women's participation in development (which is the theme of this report), he makes two statements from direct observation. The point about *commitment to themselves* goes beyond ideas of confidence to ideas of

genuine self-realisation and the point about the emergence of leaders explains why self-realisation is tied in to participation. Before moving on to participation, however, let us look at one more attestation by a woman. Yussuf Kassam in a fascinating collection Voices of New Literates, records the following words of a Tanzanian grandmother who had learned to read:

> "Formerly, when one walked through the streets, one couldn't read any signs. You may come across a *danger* signboard but you continue to walk ahead until someone shouts, 'Mama, mama, mama, mama, stop. But these days, alhamdulilah, I can read all the signposts such as 'Don't pass here', 'Don't walk on the grass'. In travelling also, I used to ask the driver to let me get down at a certain place, but sometimes the driver would take you much further beyond your destination. If such an incident occurs now, I shout and protest . . .
>
> So now I feel great and self-confident. I have the ability to refuse or disagree whereas formerly I easily became a victim of great injustices because I was illiterate . . . "

That is the downright comment of a person whose world still contains prohibitions, but where impassable barriers have now become surmountable hurdles.

Do women retain their confidence, courage and commitment after they have become used to being literate? Obviously part of the answer will depend on whether they can practice their learned skills both to communicate their ideas to others (in writing or print) and to gain further knowledge and pleasure from reading. Another part of the answer depends on how far literacy enables them to bring

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about change in family, community and country. The last set of conclusions from the cases surveyed are about this kind of participation by literate women.

6.3. Women's literacy and participation in change in home, community and country

A great variety of participation seems to develop from women's literacy, within the family and within the community. There is, however, no material at all on direct participation at national level.

In poor countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, women are often de facto heads of households. Even where they are not they may play a prominent economic role. In such situations, these women will take direct decisions on children's schooling, marriage etc. The kind of effect which literacy will have on those decisions has been indicated in Chapters 4 and 5.

What happens when women who are subordinate in the family structure become literate? We have already had evidence of a Nepali woman influencing her parents against marrying off her sister, at the age at which she herself had been married. Another case is that of the Indian labourer, Rajkumari. She describes how she became distressed by her father's excessive drinking in the home and apparently was able to prevail on him to drink less. It also seems that where women are literate, they may take a greater share in family decisions. This was the self-reported perception of literate women in the Sierra Leone study.

Outside the home, within the local community, literacy was reported as encouraging women's participation in very many cases. It should be noted, however, that schooled women, as compared to women who have come to literacy through adult programmes, are occasionally reported as less active in community organisations.

Participation in the literacy programme may in itself provide the impetus for subsequently working together, as with the Zimbabwe literacy

groups becoming production units. An interesting case is that of a Dutch-funded women's literacy project in Haiti, described by Beate Schmidt (German Adult Education Association, 1988). A team of ten educated Haitian women worked with three groups of non-literates to help them to become literate through material relating to their everyday life and problems. One of the aims of the project was to give the women opportunities to get to know each other so that they could then organise themselves and plan long-term joint activities. This strategy seems to have taken effect. Schmidt concluded:

> "At the beginning of the project, their interests were very individual, each person wanted to gain the most personal profit from the course. During the classes a feeling of trust emerged and the readiness to try something out together; perhaps the instinct as well that it is easier to seek a solution to problems together."

Sometimes where there are organisations comprising both literate and non-literate women, a feeling develops that it is important for all to be literate if all are to be in a position to share in the organisational roles – Archer and Costello (1990) describe how, when a Cultural Action Workshop was set up to provide popular education for laundry workers in Lo Hermida (Chile), they became aware that a third of the women had reading difficulties. One woman's comment was: "This alerted us to the fact that in the majority of popular organizations, the post of Secretary, or any other that required knowledge of reading and writing, were life-posts."

The Haiti and Chile illustrations show aspects of the process leading newly literate women to participate in community activities. Among examples of how literate women do participate are the following:

Nepal, Ministry of Education project – The literate women began *speaking their mind in public*;

Nepal, NGO projects – *The expressing power* of women increased and they were seen as more active in the community;

Chile, ODA/NGO, small general project with a literacy element after only a short time, women began to play a more active part in various organisations, such as public health groups, neighbourhood soup-kitchens and *Christian based communities*;

India, Indian NGO literacy project – because the women could follow the documents, they took more interest in the work of the local Planning and Implementation Committee;

India, NGO women's programme – as the women acquired literacy, they were more ready to engage in solving community problems, such as rationing of commodities and police complaints;

India, Mysore, ODA/NGO project – slum committees of youth and women became confident enough to take up issues with government officials;

Peru, Lima, ODA/NGO project – women's committee organised the distribution of a free glass of milk a day for children and pregnant women (milk provided by the municipality);

Peru, Chimbote, ODA/NGO women's popular education project – literacy was reported as linked to organisation of the barrios, including organising groups for income generation;

Papua New Guinea, Huli United Church literacy programme – emergence of women leaders for church organisations.

Finally, to add another dimension to forms of community action attributed to literacy, we may look at yet another of the adventures of Rajkumari of Rajasthan. She and her mother both worked as labourers on a road gang and she and some of her friends became aware that corrupt road foremen were making a practice of deducting for themselves part of the women's wages. At payout, the women put a thumb-print on the receipt. She and some of her friends then resisted and refused to put a thumb-print on a receipt for money which they had not had. They were then taken off the muster-roll and left without work. Undaunted, Rajkumari took the foremen to court, the women got the money owing and the dissidents were put back on the muster-roll.

Not all literate women may be so persistent, or so successful, but the kind of activities listed do make a strong case for the value of literacy in promoting women's community participation and action.

In the broader arena, of national action and national government, there is, unfortunately, no information. This is an aspect which calls for further research. It may, however, be that literate women have little impact nationally, because at present in most countries women as a whole have little say in or impact on national policies and decisions, whatever their level of education – and there are usually particular constraints on women's participation where there is a military regime, intrinsically dependent on male hierarchies.

7.1. The overall case for women's literacy

The reasons given in Chapters 1 and 2 for an interest in women's literacy were partly to do with *preparing the future*, both in the family and in the community, and partly to do with enabling women to stop being the *shadows of other people*.

Women have many roles in preparing the future; as decision-makers about family size, carers for their family's nutrition and health, influences on their daughters' education, and often as heads of households; as agricultural producers, major contributors to the informal economy and experts in survival in adverse circumstances. They cannot well prepare the future if they remain in ignorance.

They also cannot effectively prepare the future if they remain *the shadows of other people*. We saw how women themselves wish to emerge from these shadows and in many countries come forward for literacy learning in spite of the obstacles they may face – of prejudice, of time and energy pressures, of inappropriate curricula.

We therefore started from a presumption that women's literacy was worth emphasising and its effects worth investigating. It was found that most research purporting to show links between women's literacy and social, economic and personal or situational change, was actually about women's schooling and that there was virtually no systematic work on the results of literacy programmes for adult women. So this report has been about the effects of women's participation in adult literacy programmes.

Although the study has been limited by time constraints and the type of data available, there is enough evidence to show that adult women's literacy brings about changes in attitudes and behaviour which in turn result in social and economic change.

Social effects of women's literacy include:

- A greater likelihood of making correct use of child health care techniques in the home, such as Oral Rehydration Therapy;
- A greater readiness to present children for immunisation;
- Cleaner homes and better child nutrition;
- An enhanced readiness to send children, including daughters, to school;
- An apparent greater disposition to space families.

Economic effects of women's literacy include:

- Greater capacity to mobilise credit and greater willingness to use banks;
- Readiness to participate in and to establish new forms of economic organisation;
- Perhaps a readiness to sustain such organisations in spite of adversity.

In many cases, it appears that economic projects precede a demand for literacy and some projects fail because literacy is not included. It was not possible to study the effect of women's literacy on their care for the environment, but there are hints that it may reinforce it.

In terms of personal change and women's situation, effects of women's literacy include:

- A release from fears of humiliation and of powerlessness;
- A strong increase in confidence and courage;
- A readiness to influence family decisions about such matters as the marriage age of girls;
- A greater disposition to cooperate in socio-economic organisations;
- A new capacity for leadership in church and welfare organisations;
- A readiness to organise against injustice and for positive advocacy on social and economic matters.

The main gap in the evidence is on the question whether literate women have been able to claim a share in national consultations and decisions.

Nevertheless, such conclusions amount to a very strong case for taking women's literacy more seriously than in the past, in policy, programmes and resource allocation. If this does not happen, as Table 7 shows, parity between males and females will in many countries not be achieved for at least a century, and the positive benefits of women's literacy, such as those just listed, will be, at least in part, forgone.

I hope that the evidence adduced is sufficient to show that emphasis on schooling of girls alone is not an appropriate strategy. It should be an accompaniment of any strategy for the improvement of women's situation, as said at the beginning; but there must also be serious emphasis on adult women's literacy, not least because adult literacy can have speedier effects and because it probably is more likely to lead to the kinds of change which will help women to take more control over their lives. Audrey Smock (1981) suggested, plausibly, that schooling of girls inevitably takes place within existing power structures and is not very likely to encourage initiative for or skills for change. Adult literacy programmes are more likely to have the kinds of flexible curricula which encourage a will to change.

7.2. Policies and resources

The prime recommendation to come out of this study is, then, that both the ODA and NGOs should give greater importance to women's literacy in both policy and resource allocation. Women's literacy has to be seen as one component in development, but a component deserving very much more priority than it gets at present.

As Wignaraja (1990) says:

> "The poor do not divide their lives into the purely *economic* or *social* or *credit*. The overall design should be capable of responding to the basic needs of the poor in an inter-related fashion . . . "

The point is not to separate out women's literacy from other women's needs and other development programmes, but to ensure that it is treated as an essential ingredient in aid packages and not either as an afterthought or an optional extra.

Much of what has been said is of relevance to the work of inter-governmental donors as well as of government aid in most donor countries. It is suggested that all donors:

1. Undertake to collect statistics on the amount (and proportion) of aid spent on adult literacy in general and literacy for adult women in particular;
2. Initiate and support more research into the effects of women's literacy, since evidence from such research can be used to guide the policies of both donors and recipient governments or NGOs (some suggestions on areas of research are given below);
3. Make a serious effort to increase spending on women's literacy, so that at least the Jomtien conference's recommended targets can be reached, i.e. to achieve parity between men and women by the year 2000 – see Table 7 p.22;
4. Ensure that adjustment policies do not encompass the reduction of services to women, including the provision of adult literacy programmes.

Suggested components of a government policy and strategy are:

1. The UK Government should use its authority in all the multi-lateral agencies to change their priorities to ensure more spending and effort on women's literacy and it should be ready to monitor the application of such policies, in e.g. the World Bank, UNICEF, the Commonwealth and OECD;
2. Women's literacy should be a required element in such packages negotiated with developing country governments as include (or cover) education, health, income-generation, agriculture or *women's promotion*;
3. The Government should set a target figure for aid expenditure on women's literacy, as a percentage of the aid budget by 1995;
4. In approval of Joint Funding programmes, the criteria in the present gender guidelines should be taken further, so that a women's literacy element is required in all health, agricultural, income-generation and women's projects;
5. Aid packages to governments should include provision for effective monitoring of both women's literacy elements and the impact of women's literacy;

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6. Such monitoring should also be more rigorously applied to Joint Funding Projects (this is said in awareness that ODA is already improving its monitoring procedures). Such monitoring should pay particular attention to progress in and outcomes of female literacy;
7. At least part of the technical training budget should be allocated to training of women managers of literacy programmes and the development of packages for training women literacy instructors;
8. The ODA should give thought to ways in which more of the developing-country women studying in Britain could be trained in some of the issues and requirements in women's literacy, building on the existing annual BALID seminar.

Suggested components of NGO policies and strategies are:
1. An even greater attention to *women's perception* in all programmes (ActionAid The Gambia reported a failure to get women's literacy off the ground; the team reporting this was all male);
2. Consideration in all development projects should be given to making an element of women's literacy integral to the projects;
3. Monitoring of projects in a comprehensive and dynamic way should include an assessment of progress in and outcomes of women's literacy.

For both ODA and NGOs, it is evident that these suggestions would involve greater expenditure on women's literacy. It has already been pointed out that aid to primary education and literacy together amount to 0.17% of all British aid. Some increase seems reasonable if literacy in general and women's literacy in particular are really regarded as important. In the case of many NGOs, their first task might be to find out how much they are actually spending on women's literacy, since I suspect that they do not know at present. The issue is not, however, wholly one of expenditure. It is also about time. Although some effects of literacy on women were quite immediate, others are only likely to come to flower over a quite extended time period. Short-term projects in women's literacy are likely to prove a waste of money, whereas spending over time is likely to become a truly successful investment in economic and social change.

7.3. Approaches to provision – curricula and organisation

Some principles on which women's literacy should be based have already been given in Chapter 3. They include:
- the opportunity for women to learn in an all-women's group or organisation;
- a developmental curriculum;
- the association of literacy acquisition with other knowledge;
- and a content and approach which takes account of women's adulthood and responsibilities.

Some additional recommendations and principles about curricula would be:
1. As in all good adult education practice, the interests of the women themselves must be consulted. Programmes should be flexible and not prescriptive. Wignaraja (1990) quotes an Indian member of the Bhoomi Sena Movement: "An outsider who comes with ready-made solutions and advice is worse than useless. He must first understand from us what our questions are . . . He alone is a friend who helps us to think about our problems on our own." The comment applies to women as well;
2. While self-awareness emerged from women in programmes based on a variety of approaches, real human development is most favoured by a *popular education* approach, as described by Archer and Costello;
3. Use should be made of radio and television to supplement and reinforce literacy programmes wherever possible. These media are widespread in urban areas and can often be used in rural parts as well – so long as transistor batteries and portable generators can be made available. (An experiment in Nigeria showed that there was no difference in performance of learners in conventional literacy classes and those learning by television, but whereas the participants in conventional classes were all men, separate television viewing rooms enabled purdah women to learn as well.)

Finally, there are two vital lessons about organisation.

We have already talked about developmental curricula. Literacy needs to be supported and sustained by the building up of a *literate environment*. One of the reasons for the failure of the exceptional efforts to raise literacy levels in Somalia in the 1970s was the lack of consolidation afterwards. It is not feasible here to discuss all the possibilities for consolidation of women's literacy. Both the ODA and NGOs need to discuss ways of ensuring consolidation, through appropriate reading materials, encouraging more rural postal services etc.

Secondly, research which I previously did with Kevin Lillis and John Oxenham for the Commonwealth Secretariat led us to the conclusion that success in all sorts of non-formal education for women depended on the existence of a sponsoring indigenous organisation with a life longer than the project. Both the ODA and NGOs would be well-advised to cooperate for women's literacy wherever possible with existing sustainable organisations to which women have an existing loyalty, or alternatively to set their sights on the emergence of a viable women's organisation as an outcome of the literacy programme.

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7.4. The role of research

While this study has uncovered helpful data, there are still many unanswered questions. Some which relate to effects and impacts are:

- Does literacy have an impact on the life expectancy of mothers?
- How far is literacy an ingredient in the sustainability of women's economic ventures?
- How far could women's literacy improve agriculture in countries where women play a large part in farming?
- What effects does literacy have on women's budgeting and spending patterns?
- How does literacy affect women's care for the environment?
- What is the interaction between schooled women and women gaining literacy in adulthood in movements for social change?

In addition, earlier recommendations on monitoring require some investigation as to the best way in which it could be carried out, with the least pressure on finance and on fieldworkers' time.

Further, most of the data used here has been assembled from finite projects. No serious research has been undertaken on long-term impacts of women's literacy in places or organisations where this has been a concern for an appreciable length of time.

As has been said, women's literacy is an utterly under-researched area.

7.5. Conclusion

Women's literacy is about preparing a positive future for their societies. It is about bringing them as individuals out of the shadows. Looking back on the work done and the evidence collected, I find these two ideas to be valid. Some parts of this work have been depressing, because so little interest has been shown in whether adult women have access to literacy or not, but on the whole it has been encouraging to find how significant women's literacy is.

BY THE RT HON LYNDA CHALKER MP, MINISTER FOR OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT, TO THE ACTIONAID SYMPOSIUM ON WOMEN'S LITERACY, 11.12.90.

"I am delighted to be here because I believe that this is one of the most important subjects – not just because I am a woman, not just because I am Minister for Overseas Development but because I have seen over many years, not just in the last 16 months, what literacy can do for women. It is like a key to a door, the other side of which there is so much to be gained but as long as you haven't got that key you are really very very much isolated. You are alone, you are in the dark, you are afraid and it was absolutely right that Professor Bown put it that way.

The importance of literacy

Literacy has to be the primary aim of all education. It is the very foundation on which all else rests. When people come to me and they want scientific equipment, they want musical equipment, they want all manner of things for school. I am very happy to try to supply something to them or to help them to achieve it – but how much better that we get further ahead with the basic literacy which is so lacking. Literacy does not just mean being able to read words and connect them to objects and ideas. It includes the application of reading and writing to everyday life: without it one is lost. I once, before I became a Minister, spent a day going around London in a wheelchair because I wanted to know what it was like for disabled people not to be able to get into a public loo, not to be able to get up and down a curb. I am lucky, I learnt to read when I was very little and I can't actually experience that fright and that isolation; I have to learn from the people I meet in Africa and Asia and many other parts of the world who have not had the chances that we have had. What they want is to acquire information, to be numerate, to communicate, to organise and to co-operate.

Last year when we were visiting Pakistan we went to a number of villages where basic literacy was beginning to take off in very simple surroundings with an old blackboard and easel sitting on the ground, not just the mothers but the children too – mothers and children learning side by side. I could not speak their language but I could tell some of the joy that those women achieved by having learned a little and how much that gave them the zest for wanting to go on learning. I will always have the image of that village in my mind when I think of women's literacy classes.

Some of you may get an ODA Christmas card this year. I meant to bring one with me tonight, on the front of that you will be able to see that it is learning, it is children and some women learning, it's a school in Andrah Pradesh in India where we are determined to help push ahead literacy for women.

The reason is that it is at the centre of development, at the centre of the development process both for the individual and for society at large and that is certainly recognised by the designation of this year as International Literacy Year. It was the theme of course in the recent World Conference in Thailand, Education for All which Roger Iredale the Head of our Education Advisers went to do on our behalf.

Why women

I am particularly pleased that you have chosen women and literacy as the theme for your Symposium this year. Adult women make up the majority of the estimated 500 million illiterates in the world. Any hundreds of million of women illiterates are hundreds of million too many. Whatever the figure and despite all our efforts we have to do something about what is actually a growing number of women who are illiterate – that worries me very much indeed. It disturbs me to know that the number of women illiterates continues to grow.

Women's literacy in the third world is important in itself and for several practical reasons too. The first is that women have a major role to play in development. In many societies it is actually the women and not the men who are responsible for growing the food crops necessary for survival.

It is the women who market the surpluses and contribute their labour to producing cash crops. Actually with that money they get from the sale they do other useful things. They contribute their labour to producing the cash crops, it is women, women, women the whole way through who are the critical production chain and if agriculture is to progress, and productivity to increase, it is vital to reach those women in a way which means that they can use some of the modern and better information to help them to produce better and perhaps with less burdens on their own budgets. If they are not literate they cannot acquire even basic information on different plants, they have no material to refer to. If you are to produce those plants in the most effective way then you will from time to time have to use fertilizers. I am a bit

against chemical fertilisers as I think many of you know, but even the less dangerous fertilisers, one needs to know how and when to use them.

How to obtain that information? You can't hold it all in your head – you need to read it ,so you need to read and all the techniques and equipment which could take some of the grind out of agriculture for women do actually need to be taught, and to learn them it is much easier when you can read. I mentioned producing surpluses and gaining money and doing other things with it.

That is very important because unless they have access to credit they will not be able to do many of the other things that they are doing, they will not be able involve themselves in any sort of co-operative activities that we see from the Bangladesh Rural Action Group, they will not be able to master the business skills necessary for breaking out of subsistence and improve the family's living standards. One is beginning to see now educated women in places as far apart as Ghana and Sri Lanka and the many others I could mention.

There is a second practical reason for insisting that women's literacy is improved. The second practical reason is that women are not only responsible for bearing children but, usually also for (most of the time) rearing them. Theirs is the main burden of ensuring success for the next generation. All the evidence shows that the better educated a woman is, the healthier and better educated her children are likely to be. Women are very good at passing on knowledge, the more they have, the more they share. Not only with their children but with a whole galaxy of people they gather around them. Women play a major role in reducing infant mortality. They could do more if they knew more about it. Just as important, they need to receive the vital message on birth control so that they can choose, so that they have a right to say what they do with their bodies and what their families should be. So it is women who need the access to information on health care, nutrition and family planning which only literacy can give them.

The tragedy in many Third World countries is that women face very serious constraints and obstacles to achieving that literacy. In common with their men-folk, they may be unable to reach literacy centres due to the large distances involved. Unlike most men they may also find that they do not have the time after managing the home, feeding the family and working long hours in the fields to do it. In addition they may not be able to leave their children. In some societies these problems are very much reinforced by social factors – traditions which prevent women from moving away from the domestic environment.

I was talking yesterday to Khu Miclai from Thailand who has done so much valuable work first in family planning and now in seeking to prevent the spread of AIDs and to counsel people who are HIV positive.

We were talking about how do you get through to Muslim families, how do you get Muslim families to accept that what you are doing is not against religion and not against their interest.

The very simple things that he has always deployed, playing with the children, getting to know the family, helping the woman, engaging the women in the things that they long to do, is the thing that gains their confidence and then you can begin to do so many of the other things that women want to do.

Some women even attend their literacy classes in secret to avoid being found out. For all these reasons I find it rather heart-warming to read in Professor Bown's stimulating paper of women who have broken through the barriers and benefited from literacy classes against very considerable odds.

These women have not only been enriched as individuals, they have also been able to enhance their contribution to the welfare of their families as a whole and to have an impact on society as a whole.

One other important aspect of women's literacy is that it enables them to have their say in decisions and take part in the political process. One of the lessons we have learned from the failure of many countries to develop their full potential is that governments must be effective. Above all this means that they must be accountable – government by the people and for the people. Illiteracy can be a powerful weapon in the hands of governments that are not prepared to allow people to participate in decisions affecting their future, and to share in the fruits of development.

As Douglas Hurd explained in his speech to the ODI in June, democratisation has a vital role to play in improving standards of government. Just as Professor Bown said, there is a language of government very often and it is quite interesting how in some countries I believe that the government do not want the women to understand, that is not so, I can assure you, in the UK. Let me just push this point home by saying this – to keep women illiterate would be to disenfranchise half the population. There can be no better reason for tackling the issue of women and literacy because we need them to be full participating democratic members of their society.

The need for universal literacy

Let us consider how we are to go about achieving this aim because it is a great agenda but a very big one. While the subject of the Symposium is women and literacy, I have to say that the problem goes much much wider. I am

totally committed to providing literacy classes for adults as a whole. I don't want illiterate men around either. I find illiterate men much more difficult o deal with than illiterate women. Let us be clear that, however important, this is just a remedial effort. These classes would not be necessary if adults could already read and write thanks to a proper school education.

The first task therefore is to improve schooling at the basic level. Girls must have open and adequate access to schooling, not just at primary level but into secondary level and it is not enough for girls to enrol at the beginning of term and for governments to show the enrolment figures. They have to keep on going to school and learning through the terms because otherwise we are going to have this problem with us for donkey's years ahead.

The University of Hull are already carrying out a study on behalf of the ODA into factors which inhibit girls' access to formal education in a number of countries. When that study is complete we shall be better able to channel our support to school systems in ways that enable girls to claim their educational birthright. This question was also tackled at the Education for All Conference.

Developing countries which address this problem can expect support from bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors, including the UK. We are determined that girls should go to school and complete their courses at school and [get on with this job and] through them perhaps they will help some of their illiterate parents.

In India, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, this is exactly what we are doing. In co-operation with national and state government we are currently investing over 30 million in improving rural school buildings and helping to teach teachers. I went to see them and saw how they were learning new methods of teaching very effectively using very simple materials but actually making teaching fun and I well remember talking to a young girl who was patiently sitting with a rather blunt pair of scissors cutting out pieces on the floor and I said to her 'You are doing an awful lot of these, what's it for'? she said 'Well, I do them for the school here and I also take a set back to my village'. This girl was 12 years old. What she wanted to do was to share what she was learning with people who had never had the chance. Immediately you see that, you know that every effort that you are making in this field is more than worthwhile.

We are shortly adding a specific literacy element to this programme in Andrah Pradesh. Our assistance is based on the principle of increasing the access of girls to formal schooling and ensuring female students are retained throughout the cycle of schooling.

Adult literacy programme

Programmes such as these however will not deal with the problem of children who slip through the literacy net in future; or those whom the system has already failed. For them special measures will be required. As I have already mentioned, the problem is greater for women than for men.

We are therefore fully committed to providing help with adult literacy outside school. We will not only do this in specific programmes, but also by linking adult literacy with other sectoral initiatives whether it be environmental ones, health ones. There are all sorts of ways in which you can use other projects to spread literacy. One of the things I love about our technical co-operation officers working out in the field is that very often they can be found by the camp fire at night teaching things that they are not there to teach, but just spreading knowledge – it is just a great sight to see.

A good example of this is Operation Hunger – a charity operating in South Africa which we support. In this project, groups of women banded together for marketing and other back-up services. For wider reasons they began to see a need for increased literacy. The need to market their wares properly led to a desire for literacy which in turn brought about more effective economic organisation. Another example: in Ghana our Programme of Action for the Mitigation of the Social Costs of Adjustment includes a major adult literacy project.

The aim is to improve services in the social sector at a time when the economy is under pressure. We are therefore assisting with the co-ordination of literacy classes throughout Ghana, using new approaches and materials and a special emphasis on functional literacy. Women are the main targets of the project and part of the work will be operational research into women's needs.

Materials

Appropriate materials are a vital element of successful literacy programmes. Here we take particular care. In Namibia for example we provided money and expertise to produce booklets for newly literate people in their pre-independence refugee camps. These were written by young Namibians and carefully edited to give them a simplicity of language appropriate to the newly literate. Moreover they drew on rural images and stories from their future homeland. For women and literacy, materials are even more important still, if women are to overcome social prejudices and traditions. This they find hard to do because they are challenging to a great extent the rule of tribal leaders, they

Left to right: Lalage Bown, The Rt. Hon. Christopher Chataway and The Rt. Hon. Lynda Chalker at the ActionAid symposium on Women's Literacy, December 1990.

are challenging the old men in the village – and some of the young men too.

The programmes must reflect wider concerns than sewing and cooking. Only in this way will they have the necessary impact. Literacy classes must help women to become good citizens in the widest sense. So nutrition and health should be covered. Also economic activity like agriculture and marketing is critical. In India the Bengal Social Service League, with our help, successfully prepares materials of this sort specifically directed at women's needs. I am sure that we can arrange some 'read across' from some of the individual projects in the different continents, because some of the concepts are very common even if the interpretation has to vary a little.

The role of NGOs

So far in my examples I have concentrated on the role we the Government can play in promoting the cause of women's literacy. This is right and proper since education is normally in the hands of government in developing countries; and this is where we must start if we are to raise standards. There is a great deal that we can do through the NGO sector. We recognise that there can be shortcomings in government after government, in every government let's be honest. Governments can fail to give literacy adequate priority within education, despite our efforts to convince them otherwise. Government bureaucracies can be ineffective due to out-dated ideas or inadequate staffing, or their staff have just not been trained. Alternatively, there can be conflict of interests between government departments, or inadequate definition of responsibility. Ministries of Education may neglect adult literacy because it falls outside their remit. They are there for the school children they are not there for the adults and certainly not for the adult women.

Social Welfare Ministries may recognise the problem but do not have the means to tackle it. We, as a government, must do what we can to solve these problems in co-operation with our developing-country partners.

Part of the solution will still be to work outside official channels in order to tackle the problem at grass-roots level. This is difficult for a donor government to do. We therefore lay great importance on channelling assistance through ActionAid and all the other NGOs. I am sure I do not need to tell an ActionAid Symposium about our Joint Funding Scheme (JFS). After all, we are co-financing with ActionAid this year 14 major long-term development projects.

Some of the most successful small-scale literacy schemes have been supported through the JFS. I hope that we can increase our joint efforts because I find it a very successful partnership with the NGOs. We have more than quadrupled the JFS over the last five years and I am keen to see it grow further. I am not sure whether I can quadruple it in the next five years but we will certainly increase it. I also welcome closer links with NGOs – we have much to learn from each other. We welcomed an ActionAid

representative on the British delegation to the conference on Education for All. I was particularly pleased by this development and greatly valued the new perspectives offered by having a non-governmental representative on the team.

The future

Now let me come to Professor Bown's *wish list*. We must as a matter of priority tackle the issue of women's literacy within primary and adult education. In particular we must link it where possible to other sectoral initiatives. We shall ensure that women's literacy and other issues of women in development are mandatory criteria in assessing our programmes. We will continue to work closely with and through NGOs. Their independence and innovation is extremely valuable. We do want to see women in development being educated women in development so we must give them literacy.

We cannot afford to rely on the JFS as our only way forward. Much of the burden which lies ahead in spreading adult literacy must be bourne by governments. Here we must carry our message out to them and persuade them of the need to use scarce aid funds in particular to improve adult literacy. Our work in Ghana, which I have described, and programmes we have undertaken in Kenya in the 1980s, point the way forward. We must be careful to avoid criticism of interference in the way other governments set their priorities. I believe that the new climate of co-operation and aid dialogue with developing countries is an opportune time to raise these issues. We shall not let women's education, and in particular literacy programmes, go by default. We shall make contact with those responsible for the literacy programmes and try to find innovative ways to help.

Above all we shall try to ensure that the development of literacy for women is linked to useful, productive activities based not only on the home, but also in the community and the workplace.

I am conscious that this is a difficult area for us all. I shall therefore be asking my officials to take our work forward in a practical way by inviting a number of organisations to come to the ODA for a whole day of talks. We need your help. We reckon that if you help one another and we help you we will get much more out of it in the long term. The agenda will be: how we can increase the impact of our efforts in the field of literacy, particularly women's literacy. I hope that concrete proposals will emerge both for us as a government, and for the organisations involved, because the people who matter are the people who today are illiterate and in a year or so's time we want to make sure that they are literate.

I leave you with an extract from a famous Indian novel *He Who Rides The Tiger* by Bhabari Bhattacharya:

> **"Kalo could just read and write and as his daughter began to get on at school, a trouble grew in his mind. When she came home, she asked him many questions about the orange shape of the Earth and the cause of the Moon's eclipse, about kings and wars of olden times, and much else. How could he let her see his vast ignorance? With resolve he started to teach himself. All day he was busy with his work but late at night, when Lekah lay asleep, he took her books from her green school bag and poured over them for hours by the light of the kerosene lamp."**

This illustrates the sense of unworthiness that lack of education can provoke: the divisions that unequal access to education can cause, in society and even within families. It also gives us hope by showing how Man's (and Woman's) indomitable spirit can overcome such adversities. We must not let ourselves be daunted by the size of the task that we face in promoting literacy, however big the figures. It is a tremendous challenge, and I believe that we have to use every development opportunity to advance literacy for women.

Thank you very much indeed."

APPENDIX 1

UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN, 3.8.81. RELEVANT EXTRACTS

PART 1

Article 1

For the purposes of the present Convention, the term *discrimination against women* shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

Article 2

States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:
(a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle;
(b) To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;
(c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;
(d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;
(e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;
(f) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;
(g) To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.

Article 3

States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Article 5

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:
(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;
(b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.

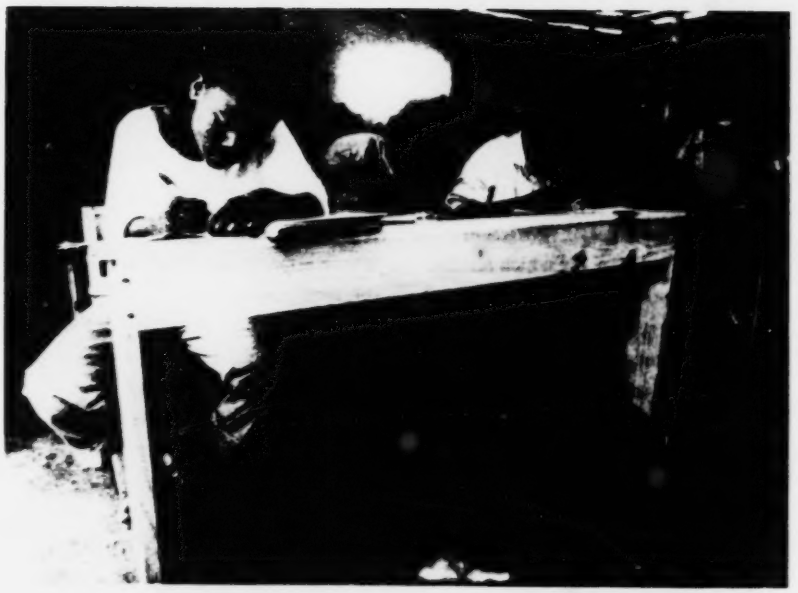
PART III

Article 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination

"If my pupils can read and write, they will be able to understand more about their society and make a positive contribution to the process of change."

against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:
(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;
(b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
(c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;
(d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
(e) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;
(f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
(g) The same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
(h) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.



JENNY MATTHEWS

Both adult and child literacy can enable even the poorest rural community to engage in a dialogue with its government and other organisations with which it relates for its future development.

Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problem faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of this Convention to women in rural areas.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
(a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
(b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
(c) To benefit directly from security programmes;
(d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;
(e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;
(f) To participate in all community activities;
(g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

APPENDIX 2.

OBJECTIVES FOR INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR, APPROVED BY UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE, AUTUMN 1987

(1) Increasing action by the governments of Member States afflicted by illiteracy or functional illiteracy to eliminate these problems, particularly through education in rural areas and urban slums, in favour of women and girls and among populations and groups having special educational problems or needs;
(2) increasing public awareness of the scope, nature and implications of illiteracy as well as of the means and conditions for combating it. In particular, an effort should be made to alert public opinion to the rate of illiteracy among adult women and its implications for the well-being of their children, the lower rate of school participation among girls than among boys and the association between illiteracy, on the one hand, and poverty, under-development and economic, social and cultural exclusion on the other;
(3) increasing popular participation, within and among countries, in efforts to combat illiteracy, particularly through activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations, voluntary associations and community groups;
(4) increasing the co-operation and solidarity among Member States in the struggle against illiteracy;
(5) increasing co-operation within the United Nations system and, more generally, among all intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the struggle against illiteracy;
(6) using International Literacy year for launching the Plan of Action for the eradication of illiteracy by the year 2000 and for addressing issues of critical importance to the progress of literacy such as reducing primary-school drop-out and establishing post-literacy programmes to prevent relapse into illiteracy.

TOM KELLY

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION JOINT FUNDING SCHEME: CHECKLIST FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPING PROJECTS

This is a checklist to help when preparing, monitoring and evaluating projects. Part I serves as an aide-memoire on the role of women in development. Part II addresses project design in relation to the preparation of the project framework.

PART I

Gender

Biological differences between men and women remain the same but the social roles that they are required to play vary between different societies and cultures and at different periods of history. 'Gender' is the term used to describe this social differentiation.

Gender roles

Men and women's roles vary from one society to another. For example in some parts of the world, such as India, unskilled construction work is accepted as *women's work* while in parts of Africa and Latin America this is identified as *men's work*. In most developing countries we often find a broad pattern of men having a single productive role while women have a dual role both productive and domestic (or reproductive). The productive role of women is often under-valued or given little recognition. Roles can change over time: in Europe and North America for example men's role in domestic activities is becoming increasingly important.

Gender needs

Because men and women have different gender roles they also have different needs. Practical gender needs are those needs of women (or men) connected with their existing roles in society: what people need to do their current jobs more easily or efficiently. Projects can be designed to meet practical gender needs without necessarily making any impact on the position of men or women in society. In contrast, strategic gender needs are about changing men and women's roles. Most governments now have policies of equity and equal opportunity but the cultural and legal status of women is still often circumscribed and specific interventions may be taken by governments to improve women's position. Activities which address practical needs of women could include:

- reducing their workload, e.g. stand pipes and hand-pumps, grinding mills, ox carts
- improving their health e.g. trained village midwives, primary health centres child spacing/family planning advice, clean water supply
- obtaining improved services for their families e.g. immunisation, primary

SARAH GATHAMS

The benefits of women's literacy are not just confined to literate women but embrace the entire community.

schools, inputs for foodcrop production, housing
- increasing incomes e.g. credit groups, skills, training access to markets

Activities which address strategic needs of women could include:
- improving education opportunities e.g. hostels for female students, gender-neutral text books, female teachers as role models, literacy classes, overseas fellowships
- improving access to productive assets e.g. rights in agricultural land, rights to common property (trees, ponds, etc), bank accounts
- improving participation in decision-making e.g. committee membership, participation in elections, managerial positions, women's groups established and supported
- gaining equal opportunity for employment e.g. jobs traditionally reserved for men are opened for women, equal wages even if there is gender division of labour.

Negative impact

Faulty project design can result in failure to address women's needs or can inadvertently make women worse off, practically or strategically e.g.
- registration of land in name of the head of the household (considered male) resulting in loss of women's rights
- urban housing projects ignoring female-headed households
- agricultural mechanisation displacing hired female labour
- new agricultural practices (e.g., line transplanting meaning heavier workload)
- new committees established excluding women members thereby reducing women's opportunity to participate in community decision-making
- new information not designed to reach women so they no longer have equal access to knowledge
- switch to cash-crop production resulting in men gaining more control over household resources
- design of new road fails to accommodate women's need for access to roadside marketing. Project Effectiveness Projects also often have objectives which are not directly related to the needs of beneficiaries. Projects may fail to achieve these objectives if they ignore gender roles and needs e.g.:
- The productive role of women in agriculture when the project objectives is to increase national foodcrop production and yet extension programmes reach men only
- The role of men in some countries in buying food, when the project objective is to reduce child malnutrition and nutrition education programmes are targeted at women only
- The practical need of women to graze domestic livestock when the project objective is commercial afforestation.

PART II
THE PROJECT

The project framework

To what extent do wider or immediate project objectives meet women's practical or strategic gender needs? Are women's practical or strategic needs mentioned as objectives? If women are not mentioned what are the reasons?

Which project outputs relate directly to women's needs? How do they relate? Are there outputs which may have a negative impact?

Is provision made to monitor and evaluate the impact of the project on women? What factual indicators would be relevant? Are the means of measuring these indicators appropriate for assessing the impact on women?

What assumptions are made about the position of women in society? Are these explicit? Are they correct?

Are inputs adequate and appropriate for meeting women's needs? For project effectiveness?

Availability of basic information

What socio-economic information on the gender roles and needs of the target group is already available? For example:
- The division of labour in productive activities
- The structure and size of households, and stages in the life cycle. What additional information is required on gender roles and relations at the household level? For example:
- The division of labour, by age and sex, within the household, including seasonal differences
- Sources of household income, including off-farm activities
- Control and decision-making within the household over cash, land and other resources. What additional information is required on gender relations at the community level? For example:
- The structure and composition by age and sex of community-level decision-making bodies. If more information is essential, what arrangements are being made to obtain it? Has a gender perspective been incorporated into terms of reference for project preparation and appraisal missions?

LIST OF MAIN CASE-STUDIES USED IN THIS REPORT

A. Cases supplied by ActionAid Consultants or ActionAid Field Workers

Burundi – Work under way in parts of Muyinga and Ruyizi Provinces
The Gambia – ActionAid Literacy and Skills Development Programme
India – 1. Case-study of Family Planning Association of India literacy programme in Hayathagar, Hyderabad
2. Case-study of programmes run by Young Women's Christian Association, Madras
Kenya – ActionAid's functional adult literacy programme
Nepal – General country case-study. Detailed study of ActionAid's own out-of-school projects since 1982
Sierra Leone – Case-study on Women Literacy and Development in Tonko Limba and Bramaia Chiefdoms
Somalia – General survey
Zaire – Women and Literacy in Kivu

B. Relevant projects supported by ODA Joint Funding Scheme (out of 53 surveyed)

Belize – Income generation for women. *Opportunities for women*
Brazil – ISER. Literacy for prostitutes. *Christian Aid*
Chile – CEDEMU community development programmes. *Oxfam*
Ecuador – INEPE Popular education programme. *CAFOD*
India – 1. Hyderabad action to conscientise, harmonise and organise rural people, non-formal education project. *Christian Aid*
2. Mysore rural literacy and health programme. *Oxfam*
3. Panvel work for unskilled women. *Women Aid*
4. Prajwala people's education programme. *Christian Aid*
Kenya – Marsabit adult literacy programme. *CAFOD*
Nepal – Income-generating project for women. *Opportunities for women*
Pakistan – Baluchistan, primary education for refugees. *Oxfam*
Peru – 1. Chimbote popular education and literacy work with women. *Oxfam*
2. Health education in El Ermitano 1982-89. *Oxfam*
Sudan – Kosti Town, women's and children's social and educational programmes. *Concern*
Yemen – Literacy programme. *CIIR*
Zaire – Equateur churches literacy project. *Christian Aid*
Zimbabwe – ALOZ adult literacy programme. *CAFOD*

C. Cases used from other sources

Bangladesh – 1. Two literacy projects
2. Community health-care project
Bolivia – Centre for Self-Managed Development
Chile – Women's movement
Colombia – 1985 literacy campaign
Haiti – Women's literacy project
India – 1. Self-Employed Women's Association
2. Seva Mandir, Rajasthan
Kenya – Kibera women's literacy group
Mexico – National literacy campaign
Mozambique – 1. Tres de Fevereiro village literacy
2. Maputo, Companhia Industrial de Matola (CIM)
Nigeria – Television literacy experiment, Northern States
Pakistan – Girl Guides' adult literacy work
Papua New Guinea – Huli United Church literacy programme
South Africa – 1. Alexandra Health Centre and University Clinic
2. Crafts Association
Zimbabwe – Savings Development Movement
Evidence from individual women from Cambodia, India, Kenya and Tanzania.

(Note: This is not a complete bibliography, but a select list of material referred to in this report)

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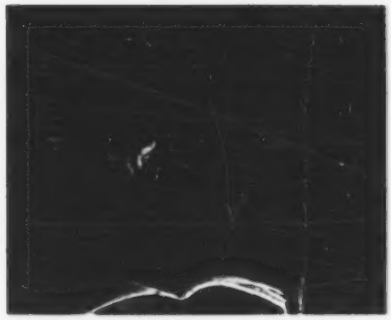

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Professor Lalage Bown has worked for over thirty years in adult education projects in Africa and is currently Director of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow. Professor Bown served on the Board of the British Council for eight years and is a trustee of Womankind Worldwide, a National Vice President of both the Townswomen's Guild and the Worker's Educational Association and a member of the governing body of the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University.

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